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The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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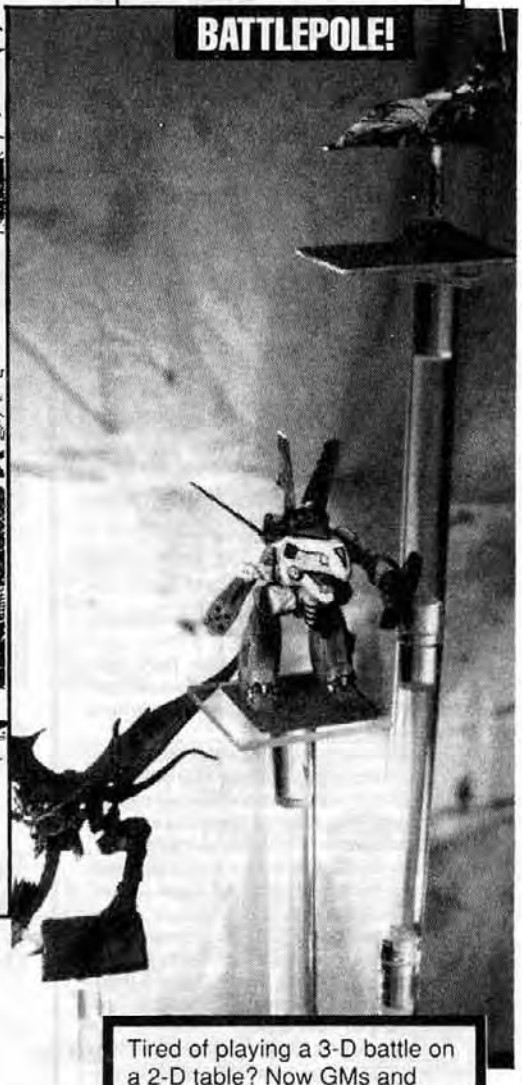
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A Jedi and his companions flee Imperial Stormtroopers in this painting from the **Star Wars** universe by David Deitrick.

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The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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CHALLENGE Opinion

***Challenge** has enjoyed a very positive response to the special issues we've produced over the last few years, including our equipment, horror, locations and bestiary editions. With that in mind, we now bring you our introductory scenarios special issue. You might ask, "What exactly is an introductory scenarios special issue?" To answer that question, let me first tell you what it is not.*

This issue is not a summarization of the rules that teach you how to play any of the myriad science-fiction RPGs available. It's not a collection of dissertations on gaming in general. And it's not a simplistic set of scenarios that will bore any experienced gamer to tears.

What it is, then, is this—a collection of exciting adventures suitable for use by players right after they have rolled up a character for the first time. The goal is not to teach you how to play but to provide a format for a referee who wants to run an adventure for beginning-level characters. The ideas and story lines are colorful and intriguing enough to challenge even the most advanced gamer.

*I hope you'll enjoy the adventures I have selected, like "Westward Ho!" for **Twilight**, "Shellgame" and "Jewell Situation" for **Mega-Traveller**, "Patron" for **Dark Conspiracy**, "Cache and Carry" for **2300 AD**, "Cult of Deception" for* Call of Cthulhu, *"Live Eye" for* Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0., *"Green Squad 3" for* Star Wars *and "Beast Man" for* High Colonies.

*In addition to the adventures, I've included "Come Join the Party" by James L. Cambias, which presents down-to-earth advice on adding new players to an established campaign. Rounding out the issue are a solitaire adventure for **Space: 1889** ("SubAfrican" by W. G. Armintrout), some basic details on preparing for the worst in **Twilight** ("Murphy's Laws of Combat") and using cyberlimbs in* Shadowrun *("An Arm and a Leg").*

I hope you enjoy this issue. And as always, I'm looking forward to receiving your feedback.

Michelle Sturgeon

Have any comments on this issue? How about gaming in general? Letters from our Readers provides gamers an opportunity to air their views. The opinions presented do not necessarily reflect those of the magazine. **Challenge** reserves the right to edit letters.

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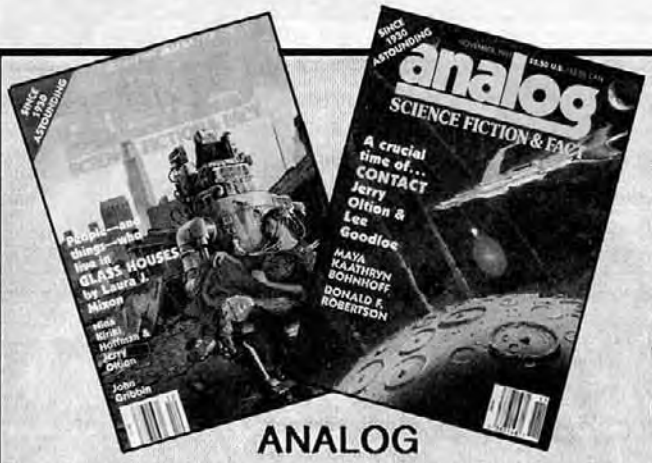
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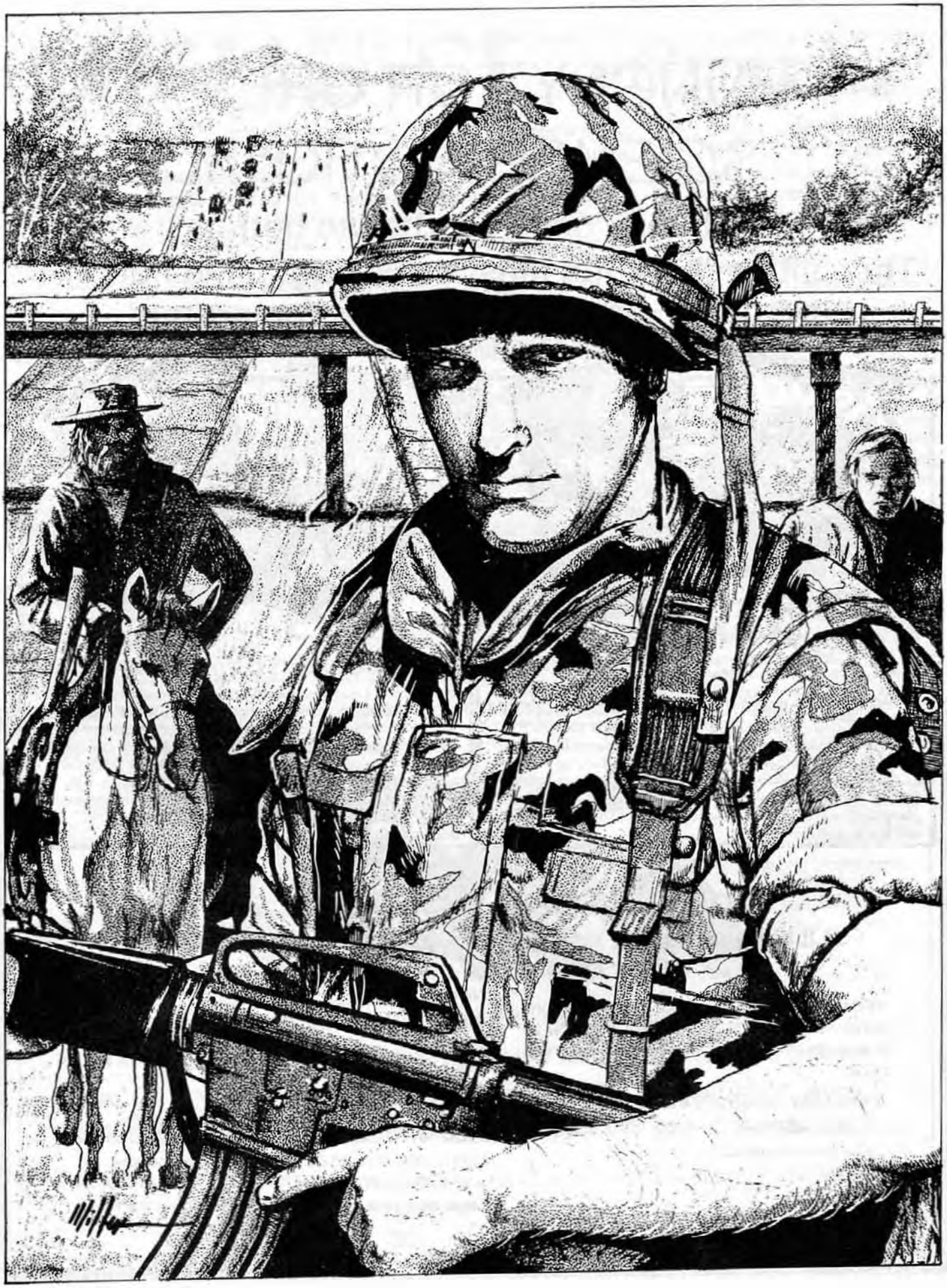
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Residents of Jamesville have thus far been safe and prosperous by the standards of the day. But that's all about to change.

Westward Ho!

By Daniel Acre

The nuclear exchange of the late 1990s and the resulting breakdown in law and order have profoundly affected the lives of most Americans. The major consequence of the bombings has been the destruction of the cities. The densely populated areas cannot feed themselves, and the disaster relief organizations have broken down under pressure. Even if the various organizations were still intact, there is no means of transportation available to the government that would enable the distribution of the limited food supplies that exist.

The food-producing areas are also in grave difficulty. The climate has been altered, with changes in temperature and precipitation resulting in decreased yields for the farms that are still in production. These problems are further increased by the lack of fuel, spare parts for farm machinery, and fertilizer, all of which are required by the heavily mechanized farming practiced in North America. Those farms that were heavily specialized, such as poultry or beef, now must produce their own feed, thus reducing their output.

Those farming communities that have managed to retain enough production to support themselves face even more problems. The massive numbers of refugees from the abandoned cities demand a share of the meager supplies of food. These refugees tend to be armed, and they appear in sufficient numbers to overwhelm the farmers defending their foodstocks. Some farmers have had all their crops stolen, including the seeds, and their livestock slaughtered, preventing them from rebuilding their farms.

The net result is that farming communities are hostile to outsiders, refusing entry to the smaller bands of starving refugees. Some farming communities have accepted rule by the larger bands of refugees and marauders, paying for protection with food. The farmers may suffer under this overlordship, but at least they are relatively safe from outside attacks.

JAMESVILLE

Jamesville is a small farming community of 325 people located midway between Lexington, Kentucky, and Knoxville, Tennessee. Thus far, the townspeople have been safe and prosperous by the standards of the day—although local water sources are drying up at an alarming rate. The change in climate has affected crop yields, but reserves allow for a few bad harvests before residents starve. A local co-op has organized the production of food and livestock. Most farmers own draft animals (or can borrow them from the co-op). The major livestock produced by the region is swine (pigs being rather easy to feed).

Jamesville has not yet suffered from an invasion by the refugees, but that may soon change. A large and well-organized band of marauders has taken over a town 20 miles away, and it has just about used up all the food stocks. Reconaissance parties have been spotted around Jamesville, and townspeople are convinced that it will be the next town taken.

The townspeople have held a number of meetings recently to discuss this problem. Messengers were sent to the nearest Civgov and Milgov camps, asking for protection from the marauders. The Civgov representative stated that he didn't have the resources available to help at the moment.

The Milgov representative, Major Bean gave the messengers a dozen M17EZs and ammunition, and offered some advice: He suggested that if the Army can't come to the town, perhaps the town can come to the Army. The area around Memphis was recently recaptured by a large force of mechanized troops. During the siege, a large area around the city was depopulated, and it is likely that a large garrison will remain in the area. Ample land lies fallow, and it is unlikely that the Mississippi will ever run dry. Therefore, Bean suggested that the townspeople relocate to a place close to Memphis. Bean has written a letter granting them safe passage through any Milgov enclaves along the way and has promised to send word to the area commander describing his plan.

For the last three weeks the Jamesville townspeople have been organizing themselves for the march westward, and attempting to hire guides and guards for the convoy.

If the PCs are in military service, Major Bean may assign them the mission of aiding the townspeople. If they are freelancers, they may be approached by a town messenger and hired for the job. Or the PCs may know someone from the town, or may just blunder into town and be offered the job. Regardless, how the PCs encounter the townspeople, they will be questioned by the sheriff (who has been designated the trail boss) and offered food, a place to stay, fuel and some money. Their job will be to ride shotgun during the trek, which will require scouting out route ahead and defending the convoy, should it be attacked.

WAGON TRAIN

The people of Jamesville are determined that they will not join the numbers of useless refugees wandering

around the countryside. They will take all the tools and equipment required to rebuild their town once they arrive at the Army-controlled area near Memphis. For the purpose of the trip, the population has been divided into 70 family units of at least four people each. Those who were single or who worked at jobs other than farming have been allocated to various families for the duration of the move. Each "family" has at least two adults between the ages of 20 and 50. Each family is allowed one wagonload of belongings, with emphasis on items required to conduct business. The wagonload includes seed for planting, enough food for the journey, and a food reserve to last until more can be produced.

Most of the wagons are flatbed trailers pulled by horses, mules, oxen or cows. They have wooden sides and bows holding tarpaulin covers over the tops, with various boxes and barrels attached to the sides.

Many of the family wagons have some piece of farm machinery attached to the rear of the wagon—four have water trailers to be used by all the people on the march, and two have trailers with methanol.

Two school buses, also pulled by horses, will carry the people who can't fit onto the wagons, or who are too young or too old to walk alongside them. There are also two flatbeds salvaged from semi rigs and modified to be pulled by animals. They will carry some of the bulkier items of machinery, including a large still (disassembled), a small mill, two generators, and various large power tools salvaged from machine shops and the local gas station.

The livestock, grouped in two major herds, includes 50 young horses and cows (driven by designated cowboys) and more than 400 pigs (driven by adolescent swineherds assisted by trained dogs).

ROUTE

The wagons are all heavily loaded, and many of the draft animals are not well suited for the job required. Thus, the sheriff hopes to stay along the highways for most of the trip. The herds will be located on the grass verges of medians of the highway, midway down the length of the convoy.

The interstate system is in relatively good condition with easy grades, making the carts easier to pull. The woods have not pushed up to the highway yet, which makes ambushes difficult. The width of the highways will allow the convoy to travel in a more compact body, as opposed to a single file extending for a kilometer and a half (70 wagons, each at least 10 meters long including the draft animal, with at least five meters between wagons, plus two buses and two flatbed trailers, and farm equipment or water trailers towed behind some wagons).

The problem with the route is that it takes the convoy near some of the abandoned cities, which increases the possibility of an attack by refugees. Some marauder bands have set up toll booths along the highway, extracting payments of food and weapons from travelers.

The sheriff hopes that the size of the convoy will intimidate the smaller bands of marauders, and those bands large enough to demand payment will make reasonable requests rather than risk heavy casualties. The sheriff is willing to pay for passage, as long as the demands are not excessive.

The following is the itinerary of the route:

First Leg: Jamesville to Knoxville, along I-75. Distance: 80 miles.

Second Leg: Knoxville to Nashville, along I-40. Distance: 185 miles.

Third Leg: Nashville to Memphis, along I-40. Distance: 201 miles.

The average speed of the convoy will be just under two miles per hour—a total of 20 miles per day. At the end of each leg of the journey, the sheriff will halt the wagon train for one day to allow for maintenance and rest. Thus, the trip will take around 24 days.

The rough timetable will be as follows:

6 a.m.: Reveille.

7 a.m.: Convoy moves out.

7 p.m.: Convoy forms circle in defensible location, cares for animals and equipment

10 p.m.: Night routine established.

DEFENSES

Of the 325 people in the town, 75 are under the age of 15 and 40 are over 65. The remainder are considered capable of defending themselves and are armed with a variety of hunting rifles, shotguns and a few battle rifles (all of which can fire semiautomatically only). Ammunition is plentiful, but heavy weapons are scarce.

Most of the people will concern themselves with their primary tasks of driving the wagons or herding the animals while en route, but they will do their share of sentry duty and will contribute to the defense of the convoy if a major attack develops.

Daytime Protection: The real defenders of the convoy will consist of the sheriff and his deputies, plus the town militia. This group includes 40 people mounted on horseback or on bicycles. Each team includes one Veteran, two Experienced and one Novice NPC. They ride in teams of four on the flanks, front and rear of the convoy. Each team has a hand radio which allows them to react to the orders of the sheriff. They are armed with M16EZs, a few M16s, two SAWs and one M60. The last weapon is located with the sheriff's team. The defenders also have two homemade fragmentation grenades and two smoke grenades (HC equivalent) per person, and plentiful ammunition.

In the event of an attack, about half

Encounters

Roll	*Point Encounter*	*Convoy/Night Encounter*
2	Ambush	Ambush/attack
3	Armed party	Armed party
4	Abandoned vehicle	Refugees
5	Small abandoned town	Merchant
6	Merchant	Merchant
7	Refugees	Refugees
8	Armed party	Armed party
9	Small town	Merchant
10	Barricade	Refugees
11	Ambush	Armed party
12	Special	Ambush/attack

the mobile force will engage the attackers, while the rest will try to escort the convoy out of the danger area. Once the convoy is past, the mobile force elements will try to disengage from the fight and rejoin the main body. The sheriff has made it clear that the overall objective is to get the convoy to its destination, not try to wipe out every band of marauders they bump into.

Night Protection: Two shifts of eight sentries each will patrol the perimeter of the wagon circle at night. In the event of an attack, every armed adult will take a post on the perimeter, with the mobile force forming a reaction group to bolster the portion of the perimeter attacked.

In addition to the normal sentries, the sheriff will designate two two-person teams from the mobile force to set up listening posts. These teams will leave the perimeter at nightfall and dig in a kilometer away along likely routes of attack. Once dug in, one member of the team will sleep while the other watches and listens for any signs of movement.

Defenders are rotated through sentry and listening post duty. Those on duty may spend the first few hours of the next day's march catching up on their sleep in one of the school buses.

If the convoy is about to be overrun in a night attack, the sheriff will order a crash evac, and all wagons will move out, on their own, to a rally point at least three miles back. This point will be a road junction or another easily recognizable spot that the convoy passed during the day. This procedure will only be used in the event of a disaster, as the panic and confusion will result in heavy losses among the people, equipment and livestock.

RECONNAISSANCE

The player character will act as the recon elements of the convoy. They will advance three to five kilometers ahead of the wagons, clearing possible ambush sites and encountering any barricades before the convoy arrives. They should stop and question all people they encounter along the route to determine possible threats to the convoy, as well as to gain information on the route ahead.

Should the PCs become engaged in a firefight, the convoy will be formed into a defensive circle, and a party from the mobile force will be dispatched to aid the player characters in either destroying their attackers or extricating themselves from contact with a superior force. If the player characters miss an ambush and the convoy is attacked, or if the convoy is attacked from the rear, the player characters could be ordered to strike the ambushers from behind.

If the player characters spot a threat, be it a party of armed men or a road block, the sheriff will instruct the PCs to take up firing positions and observe the threat. He may send a PC out to communicate with a possible enemy, but only if the highest ranking player character is comfortable with the possible risk.

The player characters will have their own weapons and equipment, plus a man pack radio to allow them to communicate with the sheriff.

ENCOUNTERS

The referee will roll on the Encounters Table once every four hours for encounters by the point elements while the convoy is on the road. There will also be one daily roll for the convoy (for a party catching up with the rear of the slow-moving convoy) and one nightly roll while the convoy is in its defensive circle.

Abandoned Vehicle, Merchant and Refugees: These encounters are as described in the basic rules.

Ambush: The group is suddenly fired upon by 2D10 people with light weapons. They will consist of 25% Experienced, 25% Veteran and 50% Novice NPCs. Roll 1D10×10 meters to determine the opening range.

Armed Party: A total of 2D10 people are spotted in the distance. They are armed and could be either hunters, town militia, or marauders. They will consist of 25% Experienced, 25% Veteran and 50% Novice. Use the basic rules to determine the range at which they are spotted.

Roll 1D6. On a result of 1-2, they are friendly; on a 3-4, they are neutral; and on a 5-6, they are hostile.

Attack: The convoy is attacked at night by 2D10 hungry marauders. Roll 1D10×10 meters to determine the opening range.

Barricade: The point elements come upon a barricade across the road. There is a 50% chance that it will be abandoned. If not, there will be 3D10 armed people, with one machinegun and an M203 grenade launcher. They are likely to be at a low state of readiness unless they have spotted the player characters. If approached, there is a 50% chance they will fire on the player character. If a toll is all they want, there is a 75% chance that it will be reasonable, and the sheriff will appear with payment. Otherwise, the sheriff will ask the players to clear the barricade, with reinforcement from the mobile force if needed.

Small Abandoned Town: The point element comes upon a small abandoned town. They can scrounge (Difficult task as it has already been gone over).

Small Town: The point element comes upon a small town. They can get information or trade for equipment. The inhabitants will not be hostile, just suspicious.

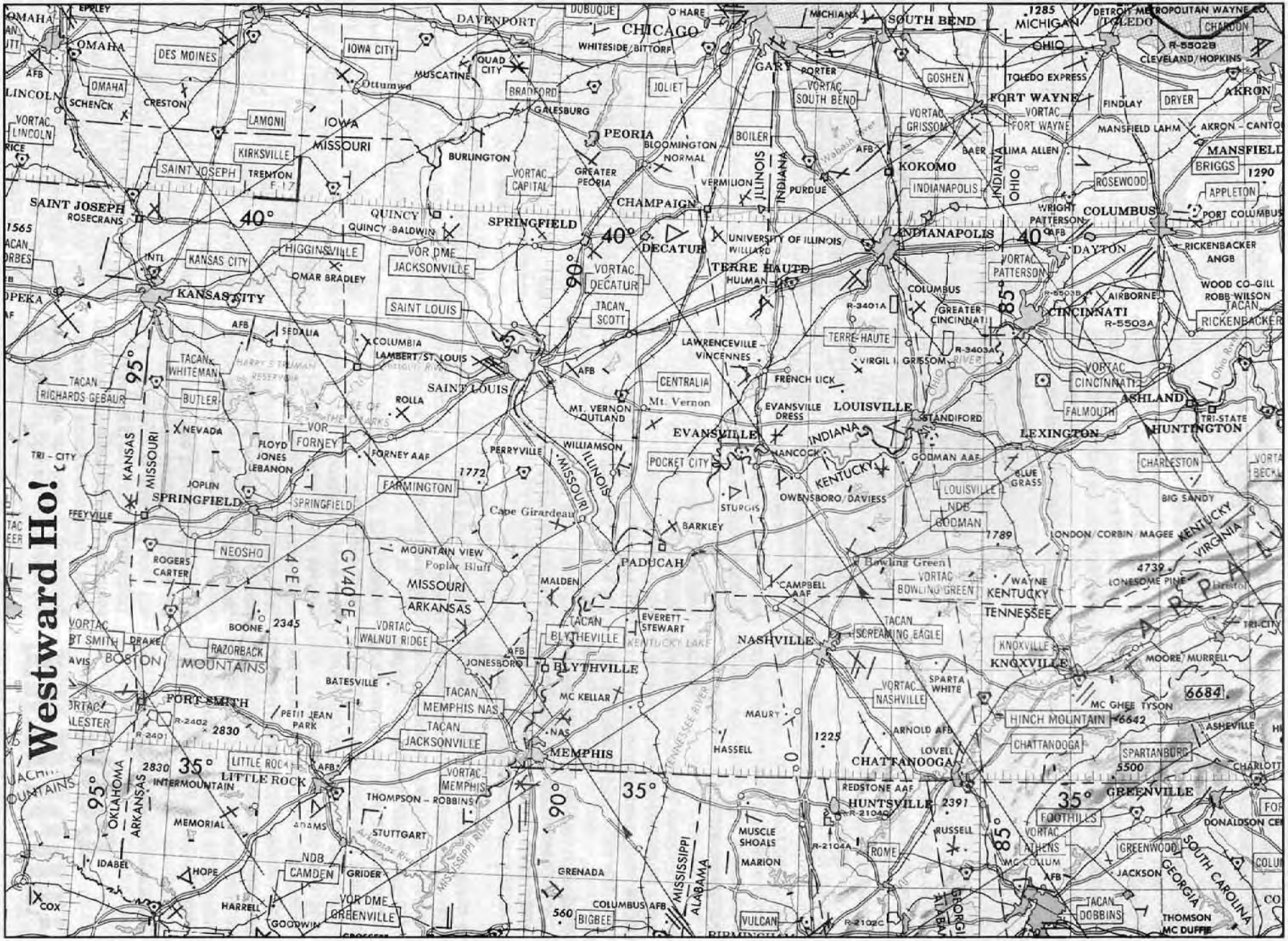
Special: On the first special roll, the mongols will attack. The second special result is a New American outpost, and the third is a US Army patrol. See details below.

Mongols Attack

Khan has discovered that the people of Jamesville are slipping out of his grasp. He leads a portion of his band in pursuit, catching the tail end of the convoy. The Mongols will number three platoons of 20 men. They consist of 25% Veterans, 25% Experienced and 50% are Novice NPCs.

Each platoon is mounted in a converted dumptruck. The vehicles' engines and cabs have been armored with steel plating, and the sides have been sandbagged. Treat each truck as a BTR 70, except if fired upon from the rear. Each platoon has one M60, one M16/203, one SAW, eight M16s, six M16EZ and three Uzis.

The Mongols will drive into the convoy at high speed, weapons firing, and only dismount if their vehicles are dam-


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KENTUCKY
BLUE GRASS
TRI-CITY
JOPLIN
SPRINGFIELD
FARMINGTON
1772
Cape Girardeau
MISSOURI
ILLINOIS
OWENSBORO/DAVIESS
STURGIS
NDB GODMAN
BIG SANDY
KANSAS
MISSOURI
FEEYVILLE
NEOSHO
ROGERS
CARTER
MOUNTAIN VIEW
Poplar Bluff
BARKLEY
PADUCAH
1789
LONDON/CORBIN/MAGEE
KENTUCKY
VIRGINIA
4739
LONESOME PINE
Bowling Green
VORTAC BOWLING GREEN
CAMPBELL AAF
WAYNE
KENTUCKY
TENNESSEE
MALDEN
MISSOURI
ARKANSAS
VORTAC WALNUT RIDGE
TACAN BLYTHEVILLE
EVERETT-STEWART
KENTUCKY LAKE
NASHVILLE
TACAN SCREAMING EAGLE
KNOXVILLE
MOORE/MURRELL
BOONE
2345
VORTAC
RAZORBACK
MOUNTAINS
BOSTON
JONESBORO
AFB
BLYTHVILLE
SPARTA WHITE
VORTAC NASHVILLE
MC GHEE TYSON
6684
HINCH MOUNTAIN
6642
ASHEVILLE
BATESVILLE
FORT SMITH
PETIT JEAN PARK
TACAN MEMPHIS NAS
MC KELLAR
MAURY
ARNOLD AFB
LOVELL
CHATTANOOGA
SPARTANBURG
5500
CHARLOTT
2830
INTERMOUNTAIN
LITTLE ROCK
AFB
TACAN JACKSONVILLE
MEMPHIS
NAS
HASSELL
1225
2391
HUNTSVILLE
REDSTONE AAF
R-2104A
R-2104C
R-2402
R-2401
MEMORIAL
THOMPSON-ROBBINS
ADAMS
STUTTGART
VORTAC MEMPHIS
MUSCLE SHOALS
MARION
RUSSELL
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HOPE
NDB CAMDEN
GRIDER
COX
HARRELL
GOODWIN
VOR DME GREENVILLE
GRENADA
COLUMBUS AFB
BIGBEE
560
VULCAN
TACAN DOBBINS
THOMSON MC DUFFIE
JACKSON
95°
90°
85°
40°
35°

aged or if they face strong opposition. If Khan is killed, the attackers will withdraw, and the platoon commanders will start fighting among themselves to determine who will become the new leader.

New American Outpost

The forward elements will report seeing what seems to be a military outpost, with uniformed and armed soldiers manning a checkpoint. The soldiers will be in US Army BDUs, but with a blue armband with a white star in the center. If the forward elements continue to observe the checkpoint, they will notice that a number of refugees are being detained in three fenced-off enclosures. There will be a total of five five-ton military pattern trucks, three pickup trucks and three Hummers parked near a filling station that serves as the headquarters for this detachment.

The detachment is on a labor roundup, pressing recruits for labor camps. The group numbers 25 individuals armed with one .50 caliber MG (mounted on a Hummer), two M60s, four M16/203s, two SAWs and 17 M16s. Five people, including the leader, are Veteran NPCs; 15 are Experienced; and the remaining 10 are Novices. At any one time there will be eight men on duty—four at the sandbagged checkpoint (with one M60), three guarding the enclosures (with one M60), and one manning the .50 caliber, guarding the vehicles. Off-duty soldiers are either sleeping in the filling station, engaged in maintenance of equipment or torturing the prisoners, especially the women and blacks.

Any characters who approach the checkpoint will be ordered to disarm themselves and will be subjected to a thorough and rough interrogation. The detachment commander is rather paranoid of being outside the major NA enclave and will not bother with attempts to recruit the player characters to the NA cause.

US Army Patrol

The forward elements encounter a patrol from the US Army forces in Memphis. This patrol will consist of 12 soldiers in three Hummers. They consist of three Veteran, six Experienced and three Novice NPCs. They are armed with two M60s and one Mark 12 grenade launcher (all mounted on their Hummers), four M16/203s and eight M16s. They will join the convoy, travelling with the main body as a reaction force.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the convoy arrives at the relative safety of the Memphis enclave, the people will be granted land suitable for the rebuilding of the their town. The player characters will receive their promised reward, plus a generous bonus if their performance warrants it. This bonus will consist of their choice of any equipment captured along the route, including vehicles salvaged.

The PCs will also be offered jobs by the Milgov commander in Memphis, ranging from standard military functions to commissions to aid residents of other towns.

SHERIFF ALVIN BUFORD

Alvin Buford has been a policeman in the town since he returned from two tours in Vietnam. His first tour was as an NCO in a Special forces A Team. The second tour was as a district advisor in the Delta, where his main task was to act as the coordinator of a number of fortified hamlets and commander of the district popular forces reaction platoon. This experience formed the basis for his plans and organization of the convoy.

The sheriff is 56 years old. His insistence on physical fitness within the department has kept him and his deputies in excellent shape. Since the start of the war, Buford has spent a great deal of time training his mobile force in military tactics, so he has a good force on hand for this journey.

Buford is a mature, experienced and calculating leader. He will try to bargain rather than fight, but if a fight is inevitable, he will provide solid leadership and a good plan. His motivation is simple: He has sworn to protect the town and its people, and he takes his oath very seriously.

His only weak spot is his family—a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren (his son is an MIA in Europe). If anything happens to his family, he is likely to temporarily forget his other responsibilities and extract revenge on those who harmed them.

Buford is an Elite NPC.

TWILIGHT: 2000

MAYOR JIM WATSON

Jim Watson is the mayor and town doctor. The breakdown of civil authority left him dazed and confused. He will provide strong leadership until there is any violence, then he will become progressively more worthless as a source of guidance to the community (although his professionalism as a doctor will not suffer). His major problem is that he cannot adjust to the new realities of life in America. He cannot believe that people have descended to the level of lawlessness that they have.

Watson strongly believes that life is sacred and will always try to find a compromise, even if he is dealing with marauders. He will not authorize any preemptive strikes against hostile forces, preferring to try to buy safe passage through their roadblocks.

Watson is an Elite NPC when relating to medicine and a Novice in all other aspects.

"KHAN" WHYOUMING

Douglas "Kahn" Whyouming is the leader of the marauder band that is one of the major reasons for the evacuation of Jamesville. Before the war, Whyouming spent his time between prison terms as a member of various motorcycle gangs. When the bombs fell, Whyouming organized a massive prison break and formed the more violent prisoners into the cadre of his marauding band. They adopted the name "The Mongols," and Whyouming became the khan.

His tactics are simple—his band members move into a town, kill all those who oppose them, terrorize the survivors, and take all the food, fuel and weapons they find. Once the town is stripped of all that is useful, the band leaves and attacks the next town.

Khan has selected Jamesville as his next target, and when he finds out that the people have left, he will lead the Mongols in an attack on the convoy. Ω



MURPHY'S LAWS OF COMBAT

By Adam Geibel

You've spent weeks preparing for this mission. The perfect plan. The right personnel. The proper equipment. Finally, the time arrives. You lay in the cold, wet grass for hours, waiting, silently waiting.

At last your patience is rewarded. The enemy walks into your ambush. Adrenaline pulses through your veins as you squeeze the detonator of the Claymore and—nothing. You smack the machinegunner's shoulder; he pulls the trigger and—silence. Dead silence.

Wet circuits, dud round, frozen firing pin, it doesn't matter. Murphy is on your side.

No matter how high-tech the art of war becomes, no matter how many plans, map studies, drills and inspections you make, things still go wrong. But realizing this ahead of time and preparing to work through the inevitable SNAFU may help you avoid needless headaches and casualties. Murphy can be beat—or at least frustrated—with a combination of good SOPs (see **Challenge 51**), mission-specific secondary and tertiary plans, and the right attitude toward adversity.

To achieve a problem-solving frame of mind, you'll need to be aware of the following axioms. But remember two things: First, no axiom is always true, and second, the enemy probably has a copy of this listing in his track.

1. If the enemy is in range, so are you.
2. Your weapon was made by the lowest bidder.
3. Never share a foxhole with anyone braver than you.
4. If your attack is going really well, it's an ambush.
5. If it's stupid but works, it isn't stupid.
6. Make it tough for the enemy to get in, and you can't get out.
7. If you're short of everything except the enemy, you're in combat.
8. Anything you do can get you shot, including doing nothing.
9. Incoming fire has the right of way.
10. The only thing more accurate than incoming fire is incoming friendly fire.
11. If your plan works, the enemy was probably low on ammo.
12. The enemy diversion you're ignoring is the main attack.
13. The most dangerous weapon in the enemy's arsenal is one of your own second lieutenants carrying a map and compass.
14. All five-second grenade fuses burn down in three seconds.
15. No plan survives the first contact intact.

16. If you're forward of your position, the artillery will fall short.
17. The important things are always simple.
18. The easy way is always mined.
19. Radios fail as soon as you need fire support.
20. When you have secured an area, don't forget to tell the enemy.
21. No combat-ready unit has ever passed inspection.
22. Beer math is simple: 37 men times two beers each equals 49 cases.
23. Body count math is simple: two hostile bodies plus one probable plus two pigs equals 37 enemy KIA.
24. Things that must be together to work usually can't be shipped together.
25. Tracers work both ways.
26. Recoilless rifles aren't.
27. If you take more than your fair share of objectives, you'll have more than your fair share of objectives to take.
28. When both sides are convinced they're about to lose, they're both right.
29. Professional soldiers are predictable.
30. The world is full of amateurs. Ω

This article is loosely adapted from an anonymous list circulated during the Vietnam War, which was in turn taken from a list found inscribed on the walls of Jericho.

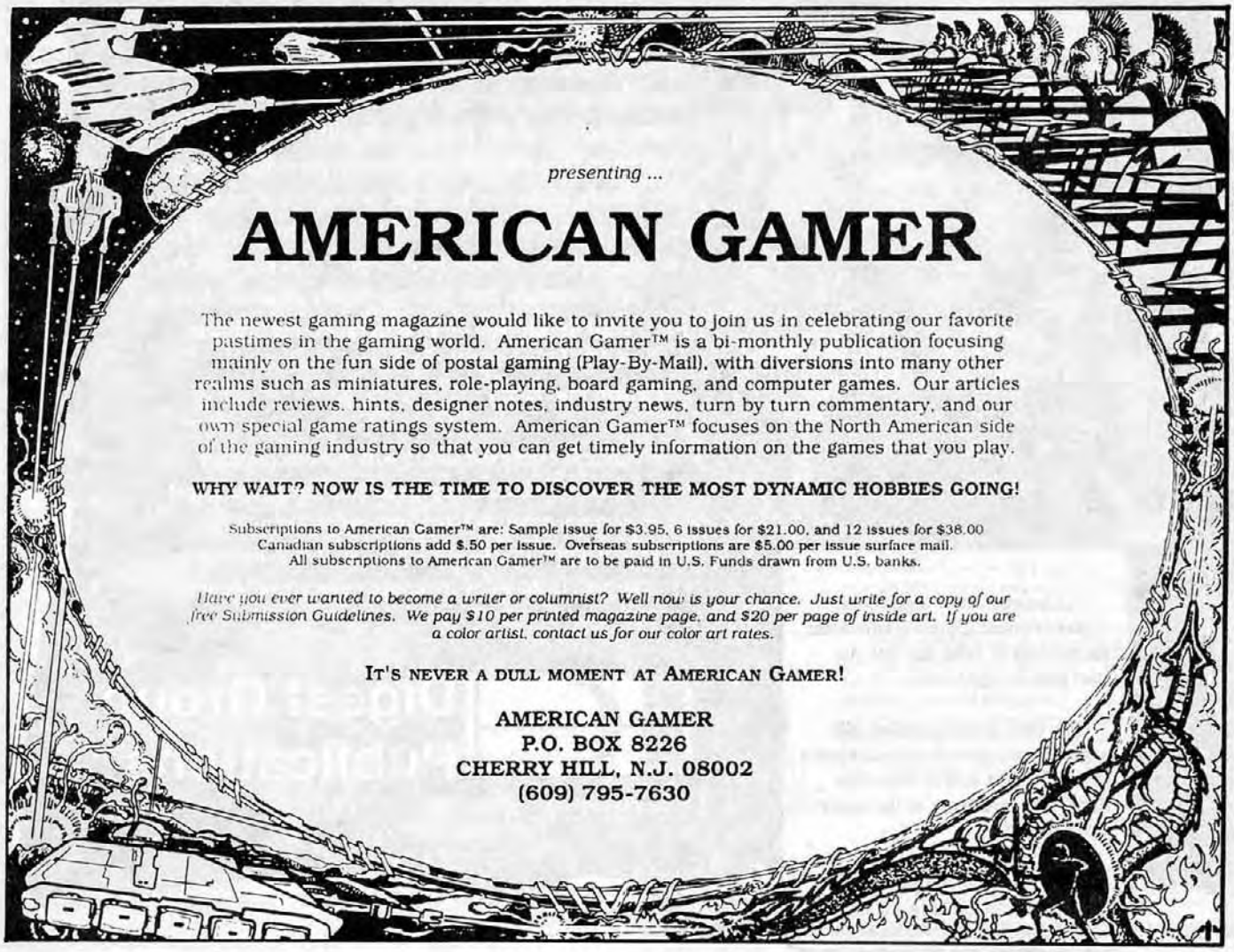
Clarification

The cover credit in **Challenge 52** referred to the "Retread Shop" by Thomas Kidd. This has apparently led to some confusion. The book *Retread Shop* is a novel by T. Jackson King (Copyright©1988 by Thomas Jackson King, Jr.). The artwork "Retread Shop" is a painting by Thomas Kidd. The painting is the cover of **Challenge 52** and also of the novel.

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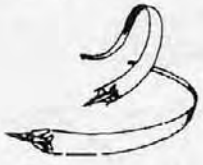
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Shellgame

By Charles E. Gannon





This adventure is designed for PCs who have only three or less terms of service/experience, have recently mustered out, and do not have a great deal of monetary or material assets. For more formidable PC groups, the number and equipment of the adversaries can be increased in order to ensure a challenging level of play. Task rolls have been used to resolve a number of situations that might be well adjudicated through tactical roleplaying. In these instances, ample information has been provided for those referees who prefer a more detailed approach.

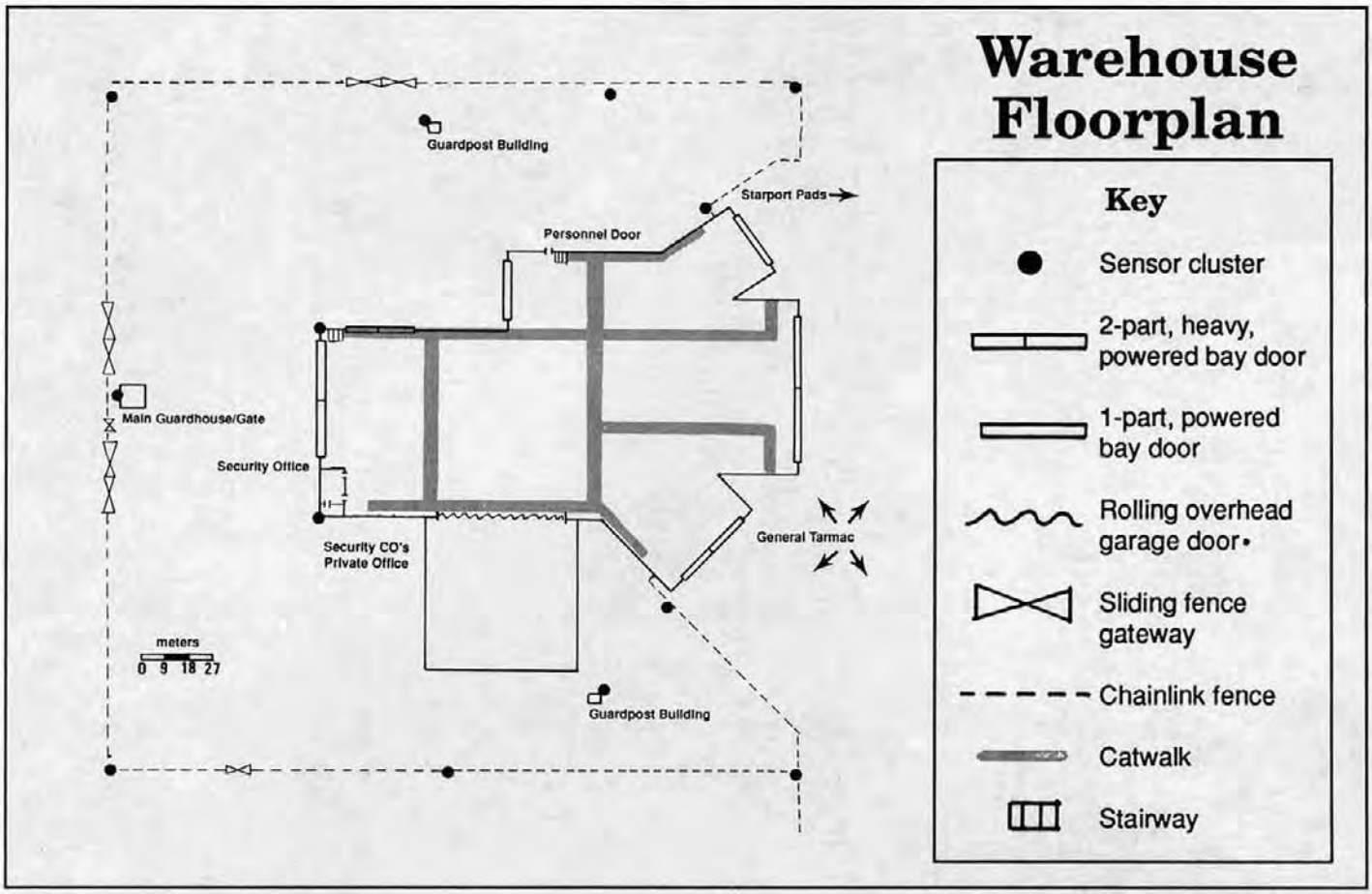
"Shellgame" takes places on the TL9, balkanized world of Overnale (B45467A-9, hex 1937) in the Spinward Marches sector. It may occur anytime after 1121.

DISCREPANCY IN LADING

The PCs have taken some job related to starport operations or have been sent to the downport to handle some matter for their current employer. Or they have been lured to the starport by a hot job prospect (which includes a free off-world ticket in the the direction the PCs wish to go, etc.).

When the PCs reach the starport, they find that the main concourse has been closed due to a burst coolant conduit: Repair crews are up to their ankles in viscous green fluids.

Alternate access routes are hopelessly crowded. However, between the



nearby stacks of modular cargo containers, the PCs notice a narrow crevice that leads in the general direction they wish to go. Moving through this passage, they emerge on one of the many lading tarmacs, satisfyingly close to their destination.

On the tarmac is a 1000-ton merchant. Automated winches and cranes are off-loading a number of extremely large containers, all of which bear a large lading banner identifying their contents as habitation modules. The ship's captain stands nearby, overseeing the off-loading and discussing the process with a Starport Authority (SA) officer. Just as the PCs pass by, one of the largest automated stevedores malfunctions and drops its load—a massive rectangular cargo container. Landing hard on a corner, the container's flimsy side ruptures, splitting open as though gashed. The cargo seems to be a small submarine—obviously not a habitation module.

The captain is quite perturbed. He glances at the PCs, then distracts the SA officer while a crewmember reseals the container. Transshipment of mislabeled cargo is an embarrassing—and illegal—breach of mercantile code.

REPORTING THE INCIDENT

The PCs have witnessed substantive evidence of the merchant's illegal attempt to mislead SA. The PCs may feel honor-bound to report the crime (or the promise of a small reward may stimulate them to act appropriately).

If the PCs do not report the event and instead attempt to extort the ship's captain, they will find the merchant unconcerned.

If the PCs report the event (either after or instead of confronting the ship's captain), the SA officials who record and log their deposition will be interested and gratified by the characters' cooperation. The senior officials will tell the PCs to expect to be recalled as witnesses for a hearing on the matter within a day, but a day passes, then two, and there is still no word. If they check into the matter, the PCs will discover that the incident has been resolved, and the guilty parties have been cleared.

Any attempt to conduct further research into the matter will produce the following results:

- The PCs will find a report indicating that SA officials checked the cargo containers in question and found that they did contain habitat modules (not submarines).
- A gruff SA officer will hit them with several fines for minor starport infractions, including unauthorized entry into a restricted area (the off-loading tarmac). There is also a warning against further false nuisance allegations. The stern wording of this letter suggests none too subtly that the PCs might find it advantageous to find some other locale—preferably some other world—to inhabit.
- A continuous stream of additional minor violations will be levied against the PCs, all with small (but cumulatively significant) fines.

UNEXPECTED PATRON

Alana Trodescieu will eventually approach the group in some crowded, poorly lit environment. After some vague introductory banter, she will comment that she has some friends in the Starport Authority who mentioned that the PCs might be in need of some help.

If the group opens up to Trodescieu, she will reveal that she is in fact an undercover agent of the Imperial Ministry of Justice. She will support this (true) claim by presenting her ministry badge,

stamped with the special Domain of Deneb commission seal.

In going over SA documents, Trodescieu discovered the PCs' deposition. She has had the captain's parent company—Odereya Ltd.—under investigation for several months now. Other irregularities in bills of lading and transshipment documents have led her to believe that the corporation is misrepresenting the nature of its cargos on a regular basis. But Trodescieu can't make an arrest and/or impound assets until she has hard evidence. Unfortunately, she's the only ministry field agent currently assigned to Overnale.

Additionally, Odereya Ltd.'s parent nation is very hesitant about cooperation with the new domain government. If the leaders of that nation were to discover that a ministry agent were directly "meddling" in their affairs, they might rethink their already tenuous ties to Archduke Norris' government. By having someone else do the dirty work, Trodescieu keeps the Domain government uninvolved. That's where the PCs come in—Trodescieu wants them to gather evidence for her by breaking into the Odereya cargo warehouse and taking photographs of the suspect cargo containers and their contents.

The PCs can then collect the reward for reporting the infraction. The evidence will also clear the PCs' names with the local authorities (who might decide to forget about the other infractions and fines. Additionally, Trodescieu will pay each PC Cr1000 plus one low passage.

MISSION

Trodescieu can give the PCs a map of the cargo module warehouse. The map indicates the permanent features of the warehouse and surrounding facilities. The warehouse will also contain an undetermined amount of cargo, arranged in a haphazard configuration.

Trodescieu can also provide two miniature still cameras (two-centimeter diameter) designed to look like glass-insulated electrical fuses. These cameras are loaded with 10-exposure rolls of low-light, autoadjusting film. As soon as the photos have been taken, the characters are to remove the film cartridge (about the size of small button) and swallow it. The film and its container are biomorphic and will not show up on the body scanners available at this tech level.

Trodescieu has a copy of the master key to the warehouse's personnel entrance. Thus, the PCs will be able to slip inside without having to jimmy locks, cut chains or overpower the guards who patrol the main bay doors. The PCs should take care not to set off any of the sensor clusters that ring the facility.

Finally, Trodescieu can present the group with an overview of the number, equipage and patrol routes of the security personnel usually on site. (See Odereya Ltd. Guards section below.)

The one thing Trodescieu cannot (and will not) provide is weaponry. Furthermore, she counsels the characters to conduct the mission completely unarmed. The local law level is somewhat high (A), and any attempt to purchase weaponry on the black market could, at worst, get the group arrested then and there. At the very least, it would deepen their criminal involvement on this planet, which will not work in their favor should they be apprehended during their break-in attempt.

ODEREYA GUARDS

There are 19 to 22 guards on duty at all times—three in the guardhouse, one in each guardpost, three on a walking patrol on an outer perimeter, 10 to 12 on a walking patrol within the facility, and two or three in the interior security office.

UCP: 968665.

Skills: Recon-1, Handgun-1, Brawling-1.

Guards have five-kilometer personal radios, flak vests and stun sticks. Fifty percent are also armed with snub revolvers with 12 tranq rounds and six HEAP rounds.

In the interior security office, guards are armored in cloth and equipped with 5mm assault rifles.

The stun stick is a TL9 brawling weapon is designed to impart a massive electrical shock to the victim. Appearing as a large, metal-studded, black nightstick, the stun stick does not work particularly well against armor (reduce the weapon's penetration and damage values to 2). The stun stick has the following attributes:

TL: 9 *Weapon:* Stun stick *Pen:* 6 *Blk:* 1 *Dmg:* 3* *Cost:* Cr275

*For individuals with Endurance 5+, this damage is assessed as though the victim has been hit with a dose-controlled tranq round. If the victim has Endurance 4–, the damage is taken as though it were a standard tranq round. A fatal overdose indicates that the shock caused the victim to go into cardiac arrest.

REFEREEING THE BREAK-IN

Any daylight break-in attempts will result in disaster. Creating forgeries to gain proper security clearance and site access will be unsuccessful; the PCs would have no way of knowing the daily security code.

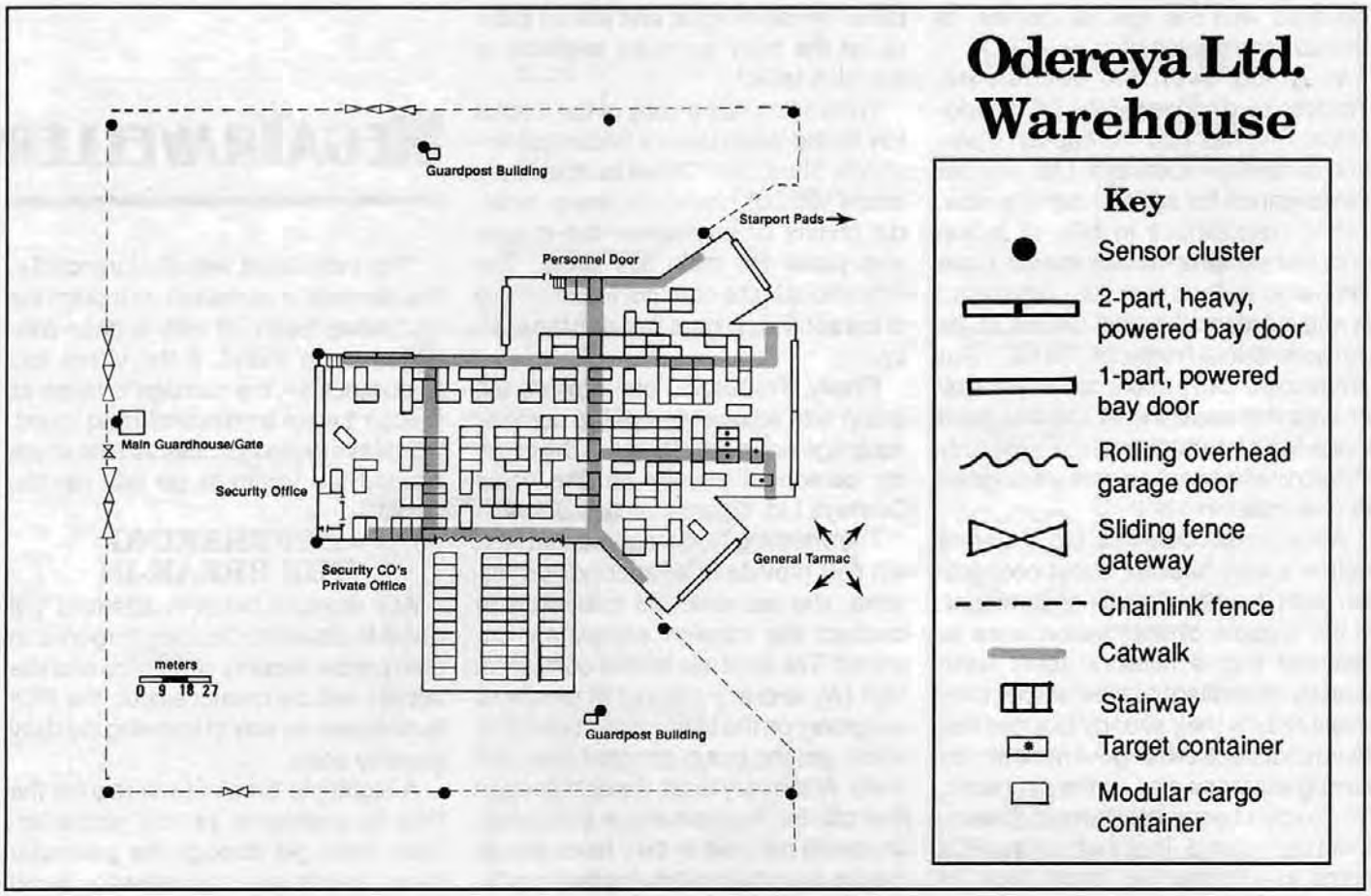
A nighttime break-in will require the PCs to overcome several obstacles. They must get through the perimeter fence, evade the outer sensors, avoid outer walking patrols, get inside the warehouse, avoid internal walking patrols, locate the target cargo containers, open a container to photograph the contents, and get out of the warehouse.

If the PCs are apprehended outside the warehouse, Odereya will immediately turn them over to the local authorities. If they are apprehended inside the warehouse, the PCs will not be turned over to the authorities immediately—not until the nuclear subs can be relocated to a safer hiding place. Then, one of two things will happen:

- The PCs will be turned over to the authorities, and Trodescieu will see to their eventual release.
- Or Odereya will offer to drop the potential criminal charges if the group agrees to put in a few months work on Aster (hex 1739), which is the destination of the subs and Odereya's corporate playground. There, an underwater mishap could lead to the untimely demise of the PCs.

Getting Through the Perimeter Fence

The perimeter fence is a standard mesh fence, 2.5 meters in height. Signs indicate that the fence is electrified—



but it is not. Other signs indicate that the guards are authorized to use lethal force if they confront intruders—but they may use lethal force only if the intruders are armed and offer resistance.

The two most likely methods of entry involve either climbing the fence or cutting through. Both are tasks.

To climb the perimeter fence:

Difficult, Strength, Dexterity, Intrusion, 9 seconds.

Referee: If someone helps the climbing character (e.g., offering a boost), the task difficulty drops to Routine. The PCs are more likely to be detected by walking patrols (or sensors) during the time they are climbing the fence.

To cut through the perimeter fence:

Routine, Strength, Mechanical, Combat Engineering, 12 seconds.

Referee: Heavy-gauge wirecutters are needed for this task. The PCs should declare at what point in the observed patrol they are making the attempt. Otherwise, the referee may randomly determine the amount of time before the next guard passes. Unless the PC cutting the fence manages an Exceptional Success, the breach in the wire grid will be impossible to conceal and will be noticed by the first passing guard. Upon noting the breach, a guard will call in and thereby alert the entire complex to the probable presence of intruders.

Evading the Outer Sensors

The sensor clusters combine wide-angle, low-light video sensors on an elevated platform (three meters above ground level) and motion sensors (buried a few inches under the ground). To avoid detection is a task, to be rolled for each round a PC is in sensor range.

To avoid detection by the video sensors:

Range from sensor determines difficulty, Recon, Dexterity, immediate, confrontation.

Referee: The difficulty level includes the probability that none of the guards (in the security office) are looking at the right security screen at the right time. The task is Formidable when the PC is close to the sensor, Difficult for medium range, and Routine for long range. If the PC is evading, decrease the task difficulty by one level. If the PC is attempting to climb the fence, increase the task difficulty by one level.

To avoid detection by the motion sensors:

Range from sensor determines difficulty, Recon, Dexterity, immediate, confrontation.

The task is Formidable when the PC is close to the sensor, Difficult for medium range, and Routine for long range.

Referee: The motion sensor's abilities are not degraded by evasive movement, nor does an NPC have to be studying the sensor readouts at the precise moment that a PC happens by.

If a motion sensor is tripped, it will set off an internal alarm (which the PCs cannot hear). The NPCs will localize the intrusion and begin to take surreptitious steps to surround and apprehend the intruders—they will not all converge on the scene with weapons drawn and sirens wailing.

Avoiding Outer Walking Patrols

Each PC must roll this task on every round when he is within 50 meters of a

guard. A guard will come this close on any given round if the referee rolls 11+ on 2D (i.e., an average of once every 12 combat rounds/72 seconds).

To avoid outer walking patrols:

Routine, Stealth, Recon, immediate, fateful.

Referee: Reduce the task by one difficulty level if the PCs do not move and are prone and if they are equipped with night vision gear. Increase the task by one difficulty level if the PCs are moving without evading or using cover (including attempting to scale the fence), and if they are making noise or using visible lights of any kind.

If the PCs fail this task, the guard will move to investigate more closely (increasing the task difficulty level by one for each subsequent round until detection occurs). A Critical Failure indicates that the guard has already spotted all the PCs and has called in the sighting (including approximate numbers and armament, if any).

If the PCs are spotted, backup units will approach at a run from the guardhouse and nearest guardpost. All other units will have been alerted. The break-in attempt had best be aborted immediately.

Getting Inside the Warehouse

The master key provided by Trodescieu will easily open the personnel door (marked on the map). Unless the player characters try to call attention to themselves, the actual entry into the warehouse is so safe and sure to succeed that it is not necessary to have them make a task roll.

Avoiding Internal Walking Patrols

Remaining unseen within the warehouse is more difficult than crossing the outer area successfully—the interior is very well lit.

Three on-duty guards patrol the catwalk (eight meters above ground level), armed with snub revolvers. Consequently, the fewer characters who venture inside, the less likely that the group will be detected.

The referee may conduct movement within the warehouse by indicating PC location on the map. In this case, PCs move at a slow walk, no more than four or five meters per round.

Or the referee may run this section of the adventure quickly using the following task profile. In this case, PCs in the warehouse must make a task roll every 30 seconds.

To avoid the walking patrols inside the warehouse:

Difficult, Stealth, Recon, immediate, fateful.

Referee: Reduce the task by one difficulty level if the PCs do not move and are under cover, and if they are equipped with night vision gear. Increase the task by one difficulty level if the PCs are moving without evading or using cover, and if they are making noise or using visible lights of any kind.

If the PCs are spotted, they will be seen by a floor patrolman on 1D roll of 1-4. The range is 2D meters. If the PCs close with the alerted guard and engage in combat, they will have to roll against being detected every six seconds (i.e., once during every combat round that they are involved in combat). If the player characters do not close with the alerted guard immediately, he will warn the rest of the guards, who will begin to converge on the point of contact. Also, once intruders are spotted within the warehouse, guards will immediately summon Starport Authority security forces.

Locating the Target Cargo Containers

The PCs must move into the area indicated on the map. Any PCs with Tactics skill might suspect that if Odereya is nervous about further inquiries, it is probably trying to get the shipment of subs moved out as soon as possible. Thus, the cargo may be ready and waiting near one of the bay doors.

The cargo containers of the shipment in question all bear identical lading banners identifying their contents as habitation modules. One of the containers has a poorly welded wound in its side.

Opening a Container to Photograph the Contents

Getting a look at the contents is a task:

To open a cargo container:

Difficult, Strength, Intrusion, 12 seconds.

Referee: If the characters have access to a solid lever (such as a crowbar), reduce the difficulty level by one. Up to three individuals may participate in any one attempt; all DMs are cumulative. Also, for every attempt, another detection task must be rolled—opening these huge containers tends to be noisy work.

The results of opening a container will result on which container they choose.

- Yes, there is a submarine inside the container, conclusively proving that Odereya was mislabeling its cargos.
- Yes, there's a minisub in the cargo container, but one of the characters will notice that it is nuclear powered. This constitutes a much more grave offense.
- No, there are no subs in this cargo container—just a habitation module. But the module is inhabited. And if any PCs have a prior military service record or can speak Zhodani, they will recognize the six inhabitants as being Zhodani.

Getting Out of the Warehouse

The PCs may find getting out of the warehouse compound just as difficult as getting in. The same task rolls apply.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

Several elements of this adventure have been left purposely open-ended and may be used if the referee wants to expand this simple investigation into a small campaign. For example, Trodescieu may offer the player characters further work in investigating the Odereya mystery. They may even be sent to Aster for more undercover work.

The referee should feel free to come up with his own explanation of why Odereya is trafficking in such merchandise and what course the PCs' investigation will take. Ω

Jewell Situation



By David Schneider

Word around the mess was that something big was going to break.

No one was sure what it was, but the way the top brass was rushing around, it had to be big. Even the media was busy churning out its usual prewar-type stuff.

With all of this going on, we all agreed that now was a good time to take our benefits and get out—before the laser really hit the aerosol.

No sooner had we received our discharge papers, though, than a sergeant from admin comes up and tells us that some colonel from the marines would like to have a chat with us. It didn't seem like much at the time, so we went along with him. If only we'd known.

This is an introductory adventure for two or three term ex-military characters who have recently mustered out. The PCs are being discharged in the Jewell system. (Jewell 1106 A777999-C A Hi In Subsector Capital, Spinward Marches). A terrorist organization has launched a terror campaign on the Jewell subsector capital. The world government has now requested that the Imperial military provide a counter-terrorist task force to bolster local police and civil defence units.

Short on personnel to deal with the problem, Colonel Hatowski seeks the help of exmilitary personnel to form mercenary units. In addition to good wages and lodgings for the mission, Hatowski can offer the PCs combat environment (CE) suits and their selection of small arms to keep at the end of the assignment. All ammunition and equipment will be supplied as well.

If the PCs accept the mission, they will soon find themselves patrolling the city streets on Jewell. The job is tedious. To make matters worse, the temperature has been so high that the heat exhaust system has been having difficulty coping, and no one can stand putting on the helmet and gloves of the CE suits.

After 10 dull days, the PCs are hot and bored, and tempers are beginning to fray. To add insult to injury, they have been given a foot patrol assignment again. So the PCs are almost relieved to hear a message come over the communicator: "All units, all units. Reports of shots fired at Ramsdill Road. Nearest unit please respond. Over." The PCs are the closest unit and are instructed to investigate the area.

TERRORISTS

The Dels Gwek terrorist group is behind the wave of terrorism occurring on Jewell and other systems in the subsector. The Dels Gwek are a lunatic fringe group which wants Jewell subsector to become part of the Zhodani Consulate. They have some links with the Zhodani and other terrorist groups, but very little support. They have turned to terrorist tactics to draw attention to their cause.

Their latest plot is to occupy a business in Ramsdill Road to set up an ambush. However, upon entering the building, they discovered a secret meeting between members of the Naasirka Corporation and representatives of a local shipping concern. The four surprised executives were subdued without a struggle. Some members of the terrorist group wanted to cancel the operation and report their discovery immediately, but the leader decided to continue with the mission and then report.

The terrorists bundled the executives into a room, tied them up, and got into position. They then fired a few pot shots at some passersby and are now waiting for the police to show up.

Driver: Waiting in the getaway van in the alley behind the building. 767763. Snub-1. Snub pistol, six HE and six HEAP rounds.

Terrorist 1: Covering the prisoners. 889763. Shotgun-2, Brawling-2. Shotgun, 30 rounds, two TL7 HE hand grenades and one smoke grenade. Cloth armor.

Terrorist 2: Covering the front door. 7B7C73. Combat Rifleman-3. Assault rifle, 30 rounds, two TL7 HE hand grenades and one smoke grenade. Cloth armor.

Terrorist 3: Covering the back door. 64B953. SMG-1. SMG, 90 rounds, two TL7 HE hand grenades and one smoke grenade. Mesh armor.

Terrorist 4: Has gone up to the second story and is stationed by a window waiting for targets. B877A3. Combat Rifleman-3, Leadership-1. ACR, 20 DS rounds, two TL7 HE hand grenades and one smoke grenade. Cloth armor.

The buildings along Ramsdill Road are all two-story businesses. There are two ground cars parked on the street, and another is abandoned in the center of the road with the doors open, the engine running and several bullet holes in it.

If the PCs approach the building from the alley, they will see a parked van with the engine running. If the PCs attempt to speak to the driver, invisible behind tinted windows, they will be told to go away in the rudest possible way. If the PCs persist, he will draw his snub pistol and shoot the nearest PC. He will then try to make his escape.

The terrorists will fire on the PCs when they get within range of the building. The PCs may be able to overpower the terrorists—but not without taking some injuries. The terrorists will attempt to flee once they see that the PCs are a formidable group—they want to report the situation to their superiors.

When they succeed in entering the building, the PCs can rescue any prisoners not killed during the battle. The shaken executives will not reveal their reason for being there. However, documents left scattered around reveal that Naasirka Corporation is preparing to pull out of Jewell system and is in the process of disposing of some of its less portable assets—primarily an unfinished, experimental asteroid mining facility located in one of Jewell's asteroid belts. The papers include detailed reports on the day-to-day functioning and administration of the facility.

Shortly after the shooting has stopped, regular police and several ambulances arrive. Injured player characters are then evacuated to a military hospital located at the Imperial naval base. Uninjured player characters find themselves transferred to desk jobs while their companions recover from

their injuries. All player characters will be asked to make a report to Colonel Hatowski but to discuss the incident with no one else.

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT

Once the PCs have recovered from their wounds, they will be summoned once again to Colonel Hatowski's office. The colonel has received instructions to provide Naasirka Corporation with a team from his antiterrorist task force. He will introduce the PCs to Balanas Krastnost, a member of Naasirka's Internal Security Branch.

Krastnost will hand the PCs some maps and other data on an asteroid mining facility, which they will immediately recognize as the one discussed in the documents they found at the terrorist attack. Krastnost will say that this is an experimental mining/ore-refining facility that Naasirka has been developing over the past few years for use in other mining operations around the Imperium. Development was completed recently, and the head office decided to sell the facility to a local business concern. However, the negotiations were interrupted by a terrorist attack and are not expected to resume for some time.

In the meantime, all contact with the facility has been lost, and the terrorists may be involved in some way. Naasirka will provide the group with a ships boat and, if necessary, a pilot, plus any reasonable equipment. The player characters will also have a special ID so they can identify themselves to the base staff.

If the PCs can regain the installation or recover the installation and employees, they will be rewarded with a sizeable bonus.

Referee: Naasirka does indeed fear for the safety of its employees and property. But it requested the PCs specifically for this mission basically to buy their silence on anything they may already know.

WHAT HAPPENED

When the leader of the terrorists found out what was going on with Naasirka and the asteroid facility, he quickly gathered up 30 of his followers and appropriated a cutter similar to that used by asteroid miners. The cutter pretended to be a mining carrier dropping off ore for refining and landed on the landing pad next to the installation. Automated ore vehicles went out to load up and then returned, full of terrorists instead of ore.

The staff was completely surprised when when the terrorists suddenly leaped out of the ore vehicles, and most were killed in the first few minutes. A few personnel rushed to the central control room, intending to activate the auto defenses and call for help. They had just activated the defenses when they were gunned down.

Normally harmless maintenance robots, armed by the auto defenses, began tracking the terrorists with their now activated lasers, starting with those in the central control room. Iris valves locked in various locations throughout the facility, and an alarm began to sound in the central control room.

The terrorists now found themselves trapped in the base, unable to return to their companions in the parking bay and unable to contact the team that had gone on to the central control room. Those in the parking bay soon realized that some sort of defense program was in operation and decided to return to the cutter to gain the tools necessary to help their comrades. But when they got back into the ore vehicle and headed out to their cutter, they were promptly wiped out by the base auto defenses. The terrorist cutter pilot panicked and tried to take off, but was shot down by a plasma A gun mounted on the roof.

The 10 terrorists remaining inside realized that they were trapped and holed up in a few rooms, fighting off robots and hoping to be rescued.

FACILITY

Contrary to what the player characters were told, the installation is not a finished product but is still under development. Unknown to the terrorists, there has been a massive malfunction in the base computer, affecting the defense robots' ability to distinguish friends from enemies. Also, the iris valves to sleeping and eating quarters could not be sealed. Nor could the air locks be sealed against people inside the base.

The asteroid base has 22 maintenance robots, each of which is equipped with a laser equivalent to a laser pistol. The central computer coordinates the activities of the robots. The computer's programming is to conserve its assets for as long as possible, so it has not pressed an attack on the terrorists.

The facility's external defenses consist of 23 laser rifler-type weapons, four 10cm recoilless rifles and a plasma A gun mounted in a turret on the roof. It also has equipment capable of scanning to the far-range band. These external weapons and robots all fire with a Weapons skill of 2.

RESCUE

Naasirka has provided a special electronics package which, when connected to door controls or other equipment, will give the operator access to the device's core programming.

To gain control of an electronic device with the electronics package:

Routine, Computers, Edu, 5 min. (safe).

The PCs will have to walk to the facility from their landing point two kilometers away, but this is not difficult in the low G of the large asteroid. As they approach the installation, they can see the downed cutter and the wreck of the ore vehicle. When the PCs come in range, the malfunctioning base computer will begin firing at them. The PCs will have to advance carefully using every inch of cover to reach the doors of the vehicle airlock closest to them. Next to the airlock controls is the slot their special electronics package fits into (this feature is standard on all experimental-type facilities).

Once they gain access to the base, the player characters can proceed inside.

The trapped terrorists will be wearing Naasirka vacc suits and will warmly greet the player characters. They will claim

that the base was attacked by pirates, but they will portray themselves as the valiant defenders from the base's staff—first beating off an attack and then being trapped by a faulty computer.

The terrorists will insist on proceeding to the base's power plant. They will explain that it is a new design, and they don't want to leave it unattended. The terrorists really want to get the power plant so that they can set the plant on overload so that it will eventually explode. They intend to abandon the PCs and take their ship back to Jewell, while the station is destroyed.

The terrorists are familiar with the basic floorplan of the base because of maps they have seen, but they will tend to hang back and let the player characters take the lead. If they slip up or if the PCs suspect their true identity, the battle will begin.

WRAPPING UP THE ADVENTURE

If the asteroid facility is destroyed and the PCs survive, Naasirka and the Imperial Navy will both be extremely displeased.

If the PCs actually let themselves be conned into helping the terrorists, the whole thing will become the biggest scandal Jewell has seen in years.

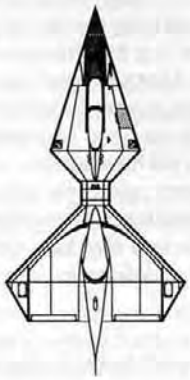
If the PCs gain control of the facility, Naasirka will pay them a very generous bonus and Colonel Hatowski will give each of them an official commendation. Once the media learns of what has happened, the PCs will become the heroes of the hour.

Unfortunately, heroes often make great targets for terrorism. Ω

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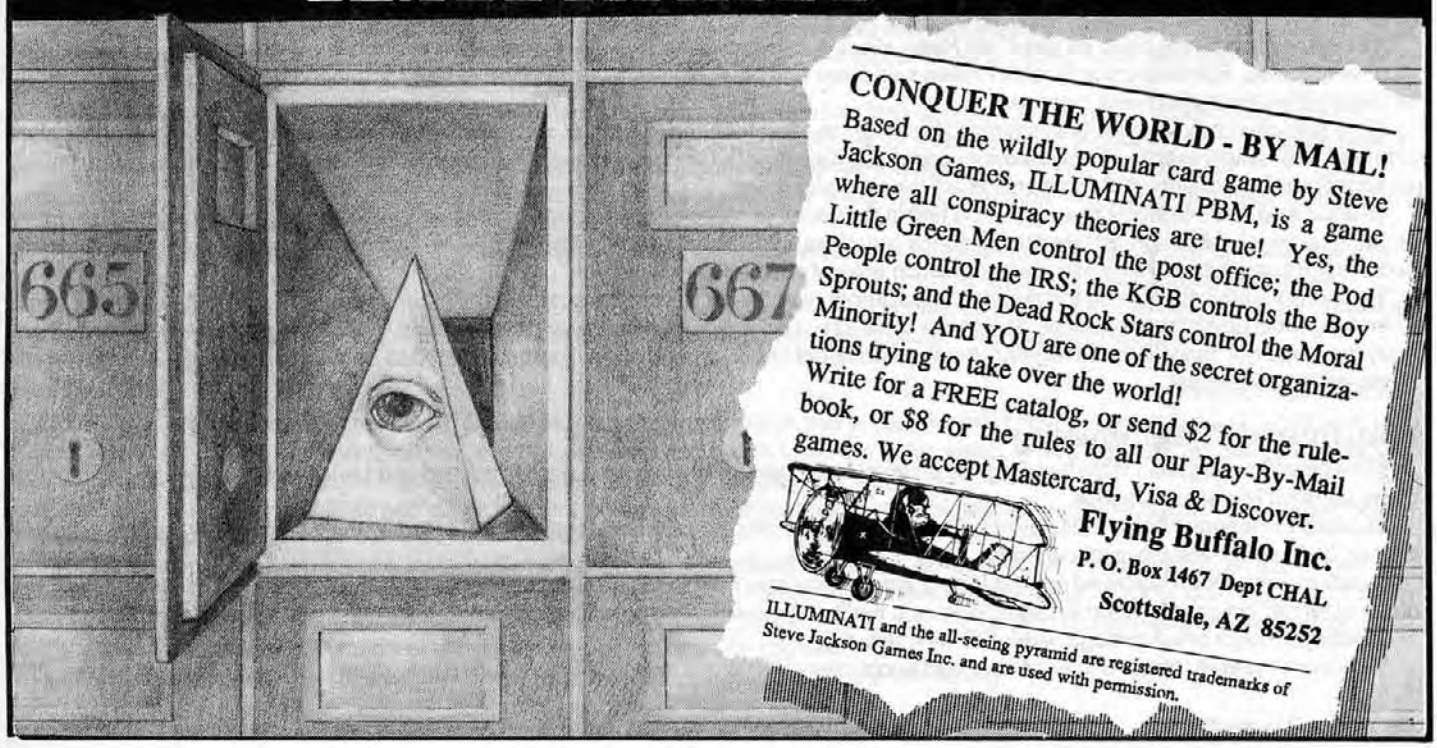
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TRAVELLER *News Service*

Shaddimir/Ilelish — Date: 019-1123

¶Unidentified units of Lucan's Imperium struck deep into the Federation of Ilelish and caused significant damage to various facilities and population centers on Shaddimir in the worst of the Black War raids reported thus far. Although various targets were hit, the attacks concentrated most strongly on this planet's Droyne population, inflicting almost 90% causalities among that race's local civilian sector.

¶Lucan's forces dropped leaflets and issued broadcasts during the attack, claiming that the Droyne of Shaddimir possessed technical knowledge dating back to the period of the Ancients and that they had agreed to use this knowledge to construct secret weapons for Dulinor.

¶Immediately after the attack, Adderly Morgan, local cultural affairs minister, dismissed these charges as "unfounded nonsense."

¶"The Droyne of Shaddimir possess no advanced technological knowledge," Morgan said, "and their only involvement in Ancient artifacts is the small ancient site that they have been excavating for two centuries."

¶Morgan added that even if the Droyne did have advanced technological knowledge, "That would still not justify the systematic destruction of their community, an act which seems perilously close to premeditated genocide."

¶Local federation military leaders expressed surprise and concern that Lucan's units' had dared to venture so far into Dulinor's sphere of control. They also expressed some worries about Droyne reaction—both locally and throughout the Imperium—to this racially specific attack.

¶Ilelish military personnel unanimously declined to comment on whether an offensive reprisal is being planned.

Manshuruk/Dagudashag — Date: 037-1123

¶Renowned hunter Emile Nodokundu died during a big-game expedition to this planet's Aasharag Outback, in a violent incident involving several local residents.

¶Two-weeks-ago, 54-year old Nodokundu contacted the Outback Patrol by radio, complaining of a fever and intermittent thoracic pains. His speech was described as being slurred and uncertain.

¶Later attempts to reestablish communication with Nodokundu failed, prompting an investigation. Patrol members proceeded to his location, where they were attacked by Nodokundu and forced to kill him. Authorities then cordoned off the area and immediately placed Nodokundu's remains in quarantine.

¶After two days of intense speculation, Chief Coroner Palitha Nursopurja held a press conference today on the post mortem results. "At the time of his death," she said, "Nodokundu was in an advanced stage of metamorphosis. Full medical and physiological results will be released later. For now, I would say that, at the time of his death, Nodokundu had begun to mutate into a devolved form of homosapiens with strong carnivore overtones. His aggressive behavior at Porbodur Range Station is consistent with that physiological analysis."

¶When asked to speculate on what had caused Nodokundu to undergo such dramatic and unprecedented changes, Nursopurja admitted, "At this point, we have not been able to do much more than isolate a foreign microbe in the lymphatic system, which seems to be the mutagenic pathogen. However, we have yet to determine the source, vulnerabilities and contagion levels of this pathogen."

¶Extrality zone officials declared a general suspension of off-world travel and contact. In a reflexive move, local officials for Lucan's Imperium have imposed full quarantine restrictions on the planet.

¶Several deserters of Lucan's military units on Manshuruk, speaking on the condition of anonymity, have suggested that the mutagenic pathogen might be an artificial construct. They claim that a significant biowar development facility in the Outback came under Lucan's control just over two years ago and has been stepping up the pace of its research since then.

¶Prompted by the possibility that this facility may have violated the long-standing restrictions regarding the use or open testing of bioagents, the local Imperial Ministry of Justice office has formally opened an investigation into the Nodokundu affair.

Kees/Zarushagar — Date: 048-1123

¶"Business has never been so good" for Kees' class-A starport, despite the post-Rebellion economic retrenchment which is hurting most economies. Spokesperson Beatrix Kaileia said Kees and other high-quality starports have experienced an upswing in trade activity as the facilities they offer have more rare.

¶She also cited a lively trade in customized biots, which she attributed to smaller and lower-tech worlds that are attempting to supplant maintenance-hungry mechanical systems. In particular, Kaileia noted the rapid increase in demand for the once-little-known jaramut moss, an endothermic floraform that functions as a biological air cooler.

¶Kaileia said Kees Starport was one of the first in the sector to redesignate its extrality zone as a visa-free zone (also referred to simply as the free zone). Although many veteran space travellers are uncomfortable with this new arrangement, the visa-free zone is rapidly becoming a necessity in those star systems which are not claimed by any faction.

¶In such systems, there is no longer any central Imperial authority to enforce or prosecute crimes committed within the extrality zone. Therefore, local governments—such as Kees'—have assumed the responsibility for patrolling and maintaining the visa-free zone. Planetary law does not apply in these regions, but the traditional Imperial legal codes (particularly those concerning violent felonies) are still observed and enforced.

Manshuruk/Dagudashag — Date: 055-1123

¶The entire investigation team handling the unusual Nodokundu case has died, according to a report released today by the local branch of the Imperial Ministry of Justice.

¶Special Investigator Nowry Vladkov declined to reveal the precise cause of death, saying only that the investigators "died of unknown causes and under mysterious circumstances."

¶Vladkov, who recently arrived on-planet as a special overseer from the Core sector, indicated that the team handling the mutation and death of famed big-game hunter Emile Nodokundu had been investigating "a number of promising leads" and that the ministry had been anticipating a major breakthrough within the next few days.

¶Vladkov revealed that field interviewers had encountered other mutated individuals during their sweep of the Aasharag Outback, the

region where Nodokundu died. These interviewers described the newly discovered mutated individuals as "'extremely violent, incoherent and often in intense pain."

¶Planetary health authorities have declared the Aasharag Outback as a restricted travel area. Military units have been dispatched to patrol and seal its periphery.

¶Vladkov has also initiated a full-scale investigation into the deaths of the first investigatory team members.

Giirsha/Massilia — Date: 059-1123

¶The creation of new interface line, Hejira Transport, has stimulated debate and controversy on Giirsha, the firm's homeworld.

¶Dedicated to serving individuals who wish to leave many of the badly battered worlds in this war-torn sector, Hejira started laying down specially designed bulk passenger ships in 1119. Hejira boasts a fleet of three modular jump-carriers, each capable of transporting 50,000 low passengers at a time. All three carriers are already reported to be running at full capacity, filling backlogged low-passage reservations outbound from the high-population worlds of Muimarir, Ugdukida and Gowandon.

¶Conservative estimates indicate that Hejira will be able to relocate over one million individuals within its first year of operations. The current desire for relocation is thought to be at least 1000 times that figure, ensuring Hejira with a steady flow of business.

¶Unfortunately, as the relocated individuals attempt to find work on Giirsha or in systems just over the border in Delphi sector, their arrival often causes disruption of planetary economies.

¶Particularly on lower-population worlds, any sudden influx into the work force places an increased burden on already stressed job markets. Various worlds in Delphi have threatened to discontinue issuing immigration permits, and others have imposed immigration fees.

Tripolis/Verge — Date:062-1123

¶A cease-fire between the Verge combine and the Federation of Ilelish was announced early this morning in the Tripolisian Senate.

¶The announcement was received quietly by the senators, even those who have worked hardest to bring it about. "I'm too tired to celebrate," explained Senior Senator Abdul McKeon, "and too saddened by all the pointless bloodshed we have endured." McKeon's comments refer to the Verge Rebellion, which formally began on 172-1122 and has wreaked havoc upon the worlds in this subsector and those nearby.

¶The rebel forces, known as the Verge Combine, surprised federation military experts with their resourcefulness and tenacity, conducting a hit-and-run campaign that emphasized commerce raiding and surgical strikes against command and communication nexi.

¶The political leader of the combine, Analea Mekatan of Turin, expressed a mixture of relief and wariness at the news of the cease-fire. She pointed out, "This is a fragile agreement in a turbulent area. Let's see if it can last to the end of the week before we get too ecstatic."

¶Federation officials denied comment regarding Dulinor's involvement in, and attitudes toward, the negotiation of the cease-fire. However, one senior defense analyst said that, with the Verge rebellion over, Dulinor could devote "more time, energy and assets to convincing Lucan that he should discontinue his Black War strikes."

Capital/Core — Date: 081-1123

¶Lucan bluntly forbade the Imperial Ministry of Justice from continuing its investigations into what is now known as the Nodokundu affair on Manshuruk (Dagudashag Sector).

¶Making his first public appearance in three weeks, Lucan went on to warn Traveller News Service that its coverage of these events was "meddlesome and prying." TNS should discontinue following this story, he said, lest the service find itself "suspected of treasonous tendencies."

¶The issuance of such a warning to the TNS is without Imperial precedent.

¶One former TNS editor suggested that Lucan's extreme reaction could indicate that the mutagenic pathogen responsible for the metamorphosis of Emile Nodokundu and others might be a retrovirus created—and tested—by Lucan's biowar experts.

¶The Imperial Ministry of Justice has made no public reply to Lucan's decree. However, rumors suggest that the ministry has initiated negotiations with Duke Craig regarding the establishment of a new headquarters and primary training facility in Daibei sector.

Ugdukida/Massilia — Date: 083-1123

¶More than 1000 persons were killed during the emigration riots that wracked this impoverished high-population world today. The riots were largely in response to the announcement that Hejira Transport's low-berth fares had risen to 1200 credits each and that an additional 5000-credit planetfall insurance surcharge was being added.

¶This surcharge is reportedly necessary in order to cover the rising emigration fees charged by many of the destination worlds.

¶In particular, the cooperatively safe and well-protected worlds of the Delphi sector have begun to increase their emigration fees, in order to generate revenue and to restrict the number and demography of potential immigrants.

¶Citizens here on Ugdukida reacted to the news of these increased rates with outrage and violence, destroying several of Hejira's advance ticketing offices and a number of starport access gates.

¶As one robotics maintenance worker explained, "They're making it so the average guy can't get away and start somewhere new, where it's safer. It's getting to be that only the rich folks can afford to leave—and they don't need to leave half as bad as us poor folks."

¶In response to the day's events, a Hejira spokesperson stated that if civil unrest continues as a result of its operations on Ugdukida, it will discontinue its low-passage runs and convert its current passenger modules into bulk haulers for grain shipment.

Umorphutwyo/Diaspora — Date: 089-1123

¶More than 40,000 people were killed in a fierce human-Droyne clash on this predominantly Droyne world this week, amid scattered reports of human-Droyne tensions throughout this sector. The clash began in the city of Adysroyo, where local Droyne launched a reprisal against a radical pro-Lucan faction that had beaten several Droyne to death last week.

¶The ensuing violence escalated and spilled over into noninvolved human neighborhoods. More than 40,000 persons were killed before a joint human-Droyne task force was able to restore order.

¶This unprecedented incident of interspeciate violence has engendered a sudden atmosphere of suspicion in both the human and Droyne communities. Umorphutwyo's ruling *aykruskloss* (oligarchic board of *oytrip* senor leaders) has announced its intent to begin constructing a separate starport, reserved exclusively for Droyne use. Human leaders are rumored to be retaliating by creating monopolistic trading alliances with the world's predominantly human mercantile clientele.

¶Off-world negotiators, recruited as objective arbiters, call the situation "grim and worsening." Ω

Fangorn Forest

Lying east of the valley of Nan Curunir, at the southern tip of the Misty Mountains, and west of the Wold of Rohan is the mysterious Forest of Fangorn, a place of rumour and fear to most men, where few dare to set foot save at its verges. This is the home of the most ancient race in Middle-earth, the Onodrim or Ents as the men of Rohan call them. In appearance and nature, somewhat akin to the trees of the Forest, the Ents are nonetheless of the speaking peoples of Endor, having been "awoken" in some mysterious fashion and taught language by the Elves, far back in the First Age.

In those ancient days, when primeval forest covered Eriador and southern Beleriand, the Ents thrived and were numerous. They were tree- herds and tended the trees of the vast Forest that were under their care with great devotion. Their mates were the Entwives who had care for and tended the smaller growing things. Thus in the First age, in the morning of the world, the Ents, like the Elves reached their zenith. Their story since those days has been one of increasing sadness. For the great forest of the Elder days was gradually cut back as men increased in numbers. The armies of Numenor cut vast tracts to build their huge armaments and navies and cultivate the land for food, and wars accounted for yet more destruction.

Yet of greater sorrow than the contraction of their home, was the estrangement and eventual disappearance of the Entwives. At the end of the First age the Entwives had crossed the Anduin, and east of the Great River had cultivated there, a vast and beautiful garden. Here they settled and taught Men much skill in plant-lore and agriculture. They saw their wandering partners, the Ents, less and less frequently as the years progressed. Then sometime during the Second Age, their beautiful gardens were ravaged by the wars of Men and Elves, and destroyed. All that remained afterwards were the empty Brown lands. The Entwives disappeared with their gardens, and wither they went remained a mystery. The Ents hold to the hope that they were not destroyed and continually search for, and seek news of them. Without the Entwives, the Ents can only diminish.

Ents have only rarely participated in the affairs of the outside world, notably in their destruction of the Dwarves of Nogrod in the woods of Ered Lindon in the First Age. They were roused to action again during the War of the Ring, when, angered by the continuing destruction of their trees by the forces of Saruman, the Ents marched en masse to Isengard and invested the great tower of Orthanc after destroying the Wizard's stronghold.



M185. Treebeard and Hobbits

Treebeard is the oldest of the Ents and the oldest living creature in Middle-earth, and the Forest of Fangorn itself means "Treebeard" in Sindar. His skin is like the bark of an ancient tree and his beard and hair like clumps of tiny interwoven leaves. He is wide beamed and amongst the strongest of his kind. The Ents are a slow folk to anger, and although Saruman had been felling the trees of the Forest edge for more than sixty years and incurring the growing resentment of the Onodrim, it took the fateful and accidental intervention of the Hobbits, Merry and Pippin, to finally stir the Ents to action. The decision to make war on Isengard was taken at the Entmoot in western Fangorn, to which Treebeard carried the amazed Hobbits in his branch- like arms.



M186. Quickbeam

Quickbeam, whose Sindarin name is Bregalad, is one of the "hastier" Ents, having earned his name for his quick-thinking and fast decision making. Most Ents ruminate for long periods on any matter before making a decision, and speak their minds with almost interminable slowness, having finally done so. Quickbeam is most exceptional in this regard, being fast in thought and action. Having an affinity with, and resemblance to the Rowan trees that are under his care, he is taller and suppler than many Ents. He is given to singing and is of cheerful disposition. Quickbeam made up his mind faster than any of his fellows at the Entmoot, to make war on Saruman.



M187. Skinbark

One of the three oldest Ents in Fangorn, along with Treebard and Leaflock, Skinbark and his folk originally lived in the forests that grew on the western side of the Misty Mountains. In the Second Age he led his people over the mountains and settled, at Treebeard's invitation, on the high ground in the west of Fangorn forest. During Saruman's rise to power in the Third Age Skinbark's folk bore the brunt of many Orcish attacks and he himself suffered injury. He led his people to the higher slopes of the eastern Hithaeglir where he mostly remains. In nature, like a tall slender birch tree, Skinbark is grey/white in colour with an almost white beard. He is highly respected by his fellow Ents.



M190. Huorn

The true nature of the large population of Huorns who inhabit Fangorn forest is a mystery: whether they are Ents who have lost the power of speech and thought or are Trees who with constant contact with the tree-herds have been animated in some way, no-one is certain. The Huorns far outnumber the Ents and are usually content to be herded and directed by them, though some truly black-hearted Huorns will attack any two footed creature and are even avoided by the Ents themselves. When stirred to anger Huorns can travel at great speed.

M188. Fimbrethil - Entwife

The beloved "Entmaiden" of Treebeard - Fimbrethil - like her sisters crossed the Anduin, at about the end of the First Age, to create their garden to the east of the Great river. Their estrangement from the forests changed them in appearance; Treebeard describes her as little like the Entmaiden of old, when he visited her in the Gardens. He describes her as Browned by nature, with hair parched like ripe corn and with rosy cheeks. Her eyes however remained the deep Entish green.





M189. Enting

The young of the Ents are called Entings. It is a great sorrow to Treebeard and his companions that there have been no Entings since the estrangement and disappearance of the Entwives and because of this the Onodrim are diminishing. This Enting is of a birch-like family of Ents and one of Skinbark's people who in the Second age live in the vast forests west of Isengard.



M191. Tolwen Elven-healer*

A Sindarin Elf, Tolwen's history is one of secret tragedy. She is a healer who can tend the ailments of Ents as well as Men. Tolwen is dressed in the graceful garb of the Elves and her tunic is threaded with Mithril.The one anomalous point of her appearance is the large black sword worn at her side, which looks so out of place on this comely Elf-maiden, and carries within it her tragic secret. Tolwen lives at the edge of Fangorn forest, at its junction with the Limlight.



M194. Female Bandit

This woman, who is Hundin's "Lady", wears what was once a stylish dress from the courts of Minas Tirith, now ragged and with riding boots beneath. Over this she wears a rougher overgarment. At her side she carries a Sagathic dagger and a Sagathic style quiver holds her arrows at her right side though, like her fellow bandits, she carries the longbow of the Northmen.





M192. Hundin, The Bandit chief*

Hundin is a deserter from the army of Gondor and has made banditry his way of life. He carries an ugly but effective club of his own design and a fierce serrated Orcish scimitar.

M193. Bandits of Tir Limlight

One Bandit, like Hundin, is an ex-soldier from Gondor. He is armed with both sword and bow. His companion is bow armed. Although a Northman, he wears a Sagathic leather cap and boots, obviously the results of a former successful ambush!



*These charecters have been originated by I.C.E. Full details can be found in the Middle-earth module Ents of Fangorn.

This page details information about every figure in this month's Mithril release. A complete MITHRIL HANDBOOK, containing pictures and descriptions of our complete range, together with Middle-earth background will be available in May.

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FASA has announced the release of *Frost Death* by Peter L. Rice, a *Renegade Legion* novel relating the exploits of the men and women of the 2567th. Next month's products will include *Prefect,* a *Renegade Legion* boxed game simulating a planetary invasion. Rules integration with *Leviathan, Interceptor* and *Centurion* is provided.

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***Challenge** Briefs describes gaming news and releases from a variety of publishers. Announcements should be sent in at least four months before a product is released, if possible. Write to **Challenge** Briefs, Managing Editor, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.*

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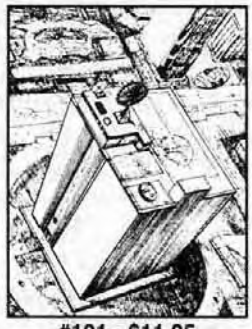
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Patron

Monsters walk the Earth? Sure.
Vampires? Right.
Werewolves? Uh-huh.
Creepy things that go bump in the night? Tell me another one. I need the laugh.
I mean, this is the kind of stuff that you read in the supermarket checkout line while you're waiting your turn, right? As far as I'm concerned, the only monsters are the smug fat cats at the top of the corporates who give themselves dividends and raises every year while slashing my pay. "Budget cutbacks," they call it. Every year they make it harder to live, while grabbing more and more of the money. And there's nothing I can do about it, or anyone I know, for that matter. But I've got to keep working—there's no government handout for the unemployed anymore.
Those are the real monsters. Maybe the street thugs might qualify too, but at least I can understand them. They're just trying to survive. Just like me.
Then this character from a horror movie invites me to dinner and tells me that monsters are after me. Pardon me if I'm a little cynical about the whole affair. The real world has no place for "monsters."
But what if he's right?

By Craig Sheeley

This introductory scenario for **Dark Conspiracy** is intended for use as a campaign beginning and aid. It acquaints the PCs with some of the lesser-known facts of the world of 2013 and gives them a solid reason for becoming monster-hunters instead of staying with their nice, safe jobs. This article also includes optional rules concerning the cost-of-living and wages in 2013.

The adventure begins when each PC receives a letter printed on very expensive paper. Each letter reads:

Dear friend,
You don't know me, and I scarcely know you, but it is essential that we meet. Please accept my invitation to the most elaborate dinner that you have ever eaten. The time is tomorrow night, at eight p.m., at my house.
It is vital to your well-being and continued lifespan that you attend, for I have information which can assist you in the crisis that will soon interrupt your life.
Sincerely,
Rheinhold Weissmann

Inside each letter is a crisp $100 bill. The address on the back of the sheet indicates an area a few kilometers beyond the boundaries of the city.

If any of the PCs do not wish to attend, they are visited at home (or whatever they call their residence) at 6 p.m. the next day. The visitor is a hard-looking cabbie, with a cab that looks like it went to Bastogne with Patton and could demolish tanks by driving through it. "You gotta dinner engagement," he says in answer to queries. "I was sent to take ya there. Step it up—we gotta drive ahead of us." If any PCs still resist, they will miss the dinner party, and Weissmann will contact them later with the information.

Weissmann's house is an enormous, multistory, Gothic mansion—dark, foreboding, a few of its ground-floor windows lit. The wrought-iron gates open automatically, and the PCs drive down the long, gravel road to the house. The terrain lining the road might as well be Demonground, choked with wild and strange vegetation that moves and gropes in the wind as if alive. When they reach the house, the PCs have to find their own way to the front door, lit as it is by a single bulb.

Anyone trying to read the house with Human Empathy gets a much different emotional picture than the outward appearance. The house is somewhat lonely, but the single person in it is alive, and strangely cheerful and vibrant. No taint of Darkness falls across the house or its grounds.

The doorbell (a real bell with a real pull-rope) is answered by an immaculately attired butler—black tie, tails, freshly polished and buffed face. A domestic 'bot—one of the most expensive exports to come from the Land of the Rising Sun. The robot takes the PCs' wraps and escorts them in to the drawing room. There, they are served drinks by a masterpiece of robotics in French maid costume.

Precisely at 8 p.m., the butler conveys the PCs into the dining room. Along the way, they see that the house is spotless and immaculate, if a bit dark, labyrinthine and truly Gothic. The robots move flawlessly, navigating with machine vision—their eyes glow red if seen in low light. So do the eyes of some of the suits of armor standing at attention at corners and in hallways. Apparently Weissmann has specialized roboservants for security, too. And their polished medieval weapons don't look like blunt replicas.

The dining room is a massive hall at the center of the mansion, the great hall. There the PCs meet their host.

A CROOKED MAN IN A CROOKED HOUSE

Rheinhold Weissmann suffers the effects of advancing age. He appears to be confined to a wheelchair, a solid motorized contrivance of severe styling. He is dressed in evening dress, his thin gray hair combed back and his cadaverous face wrinkled into a skeletal smile. When he speaks to his guests, his English is good, but his accent is


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a blend of upper-class British and German. He introduces himself, then addresses each PC by name. Then he signals for the meal to begin. He wasn't exaggerating when he promised a lavish dinner. The long table is laden with real food, dishes ranging from the everyday to the incredibly exotic. Only after he and his guests have stuffed themselves does he open discussion to the subject of why he invited them to his house.

"Within a period of a month," he says "all of you will be collected and your brains removed to become part of an alien thinking machine, a biocomputer. I could not in good conscience allow you to die without knowing your fate." He pauses for a moment to observe their reactions. With a sly, evil smile, he continues. "You doubt me. I am not surprised. If I did not know the things that I know through personal experience, I would suspect my own sanity.

"For many years, I have devoted my time to the solution of mysteries—and I have uncovered many things that man is deliberately not meant to know. Did you know there is a tunnel through nowhere that takes you from Stonehenge to the pyramid of Cheops? Or that Easter Island is merely a doorway to a sunken island topped by structures that defy description and imagination? Or that the creatures that built these places, and many more like them, are very real and walk the earth yet again? The horrors of what coexists with our fragile world are enough to blast a man's mind forever."

Weissmann cackles, looking like something out of a horror film, suitable for institutionalization. "There are monstrous, inhuman intellects behind this. The government knows of them, and knows of their plans to destroy the entire human race. But they are inefficient and stupid. And too many officials have already been compromised, corrupted and replaced by things from the other side. Fools." He laughs, then sobers abruptly. "And you, my friends, are the next victims of this dark conspiracy."

If any PC tries to threaten or attack Weissmann, the robot butler moves to protect his master (Strength 12, Initiative 6, Skill/Dam. 5/1D6+6, 3 points of armor at all locations). Weissmann listens to the PCs' protests and rebuttals, then dismisses them with a head-shake. "Proof of my words will come to you. When you go about your daily business, be wary. You shall see the tools of the enemy, following you, watching you. Already, they are moving to isolate you from the world. Your positions and jobs are becoming less important; your replacements are being readied. When you are taken, you will not be missed.

"You cannot escape this crisis. How might you deal with it? You could go to the authorities and tell them what I have told you. You might even be able to point out your watchers. At best, your stories will be ignored. At worst, you will be sent for psychiatric help—and that would surely seal your fate—you'd disappear one night, and the institution would cover with lies.

"You could heed my warning and prepare for their attack. I do not know the agency they will use or the method of their strike. But they are overconfident, uninventive and arrogant. Use this against them! Turn their trap upon them and trap them in turn!

"Or you could run, attempt to escape the doom they have laid upon you. They would find you, for their hold is even stronger away from this nation.

"And if they get you, you will live through the ultimate violation of having your living brain removed from its case, feeling your thoughts and memories disintegrating as they slice your tissue into wafers, then the agony of connection to the other scattered intellects of the machine, conscious only of the fact that you were once individuals. A fair slice of eternal damnation." He lapses into silence, concentrating on his brandy.

If the PCs decide to leave, he does not offer any resistance, nor does he appeal to them again. "If you change your mind, contact me at this number," he calls out as they leave. His robot butler hands out business cards that read "Rheinhold Weissmann, Professional Adventurer and Solver of Unsolved Mysteries."

If, instead, the PCs decide to listen to his advice and fight their unknown foes, he smiles again and nods sagely. "You have made the right choice."

He says he does not know how the Minions will strike, or whom they will employ, or when, or where. "Those are things you must find out on your own," he says. "Watch for them. Watch for people who follow you, who ask too many questions, who loiter in your vicinity. If you can, take pictures of them and send the photographs to me. I have friends who can try to identify them.

DARK CONSPIRACY

Once you have recognized the watchers, turn the tables and follow them! Find out who gives them their orders and we can crush them! My resources are at your disposal if you need them.

"Beware, though—things are not always as they appear! The most innocent person could be a tool of the enemy. They use humans for their diabolical purposes—people subverted through money, blackmail, brainwashing or worse. They may even try to subvert *you*. Do not listen to promises of wealth, power or influence. They tried to subvert me, to buy me out, some years ago. I declined. If you wish to see how, the head of their messenger is preserved on the wall in the den." If the PCs wish to check his story out, the butler will escort them. Weissmann's den at first glance seems perfectly ordinary—lined with bookshelves, furnished with heavy, overstuffed chairs, etc. But it also features the mounted heads of a bloodkin Vampire, an insectoid ET and one of the Cobra People.

PLAN OF ACTION

To save themselves, the PCs must somehow uncover the plot against them. They can find out who's watching them and trace the plot to the ambulance service and then to the coroner (see below). Or they can play a waiting game and hope to ambush the Minion's forces (the thugs or the ambulance crews) when they make their move. Or they can assault the ambulance service and destroy the threat before it strikes (actually only a temporary setback), etc.

Weissmann can't really help them, but he counts as a high-level government and civil contact for purposes of obtaining information, thanks to his extensive contacts. Also, if the PCs need equipment that's hard to come by, Weissmann can deliver, on loan.

WATCHERS

Each PC is being watched. Nearly every hour of the day, someone—or something—watches them, tracking

Jobs in Dark Conspiracy

Most of the workers in **Dark Conspiracy** are owned by the corporations, the megaconglomerates that control over 90% of the world's resources and production.

The PCs are probably mikes—middle-class workers—either working for corporations or working independently. The former—wage slaves—are guaranteed payment for their time and energy, as long as they do their jobs. Of course, most of their pay goes to compensate the corporates for housing, medical care, etc. True mikes, the independents, have more disposable wealth but more things that they have to spend it on.

Wage slaves receive wages equal to their Education times $125 per month. This is take-home pay. Actually, they are paid much more, but they also have corporate-provided housing in Mike-Town, medical care covering sickness and injury (but not repeated combat wounds—if a wage-slave ends up coming in with too many gunshot/knife/shrapnel wounds, the corporate investigators are going to have plenty of questions). In return for these wages and benefits, the corporations expect the wage-slave to work 40 hours a week, every week, except for two weeks of paid holiday leave.

Needless to say, wage-slaves have obligations that get in the way of adventuring and chasing Dark Minions. PC careers appropriate to wage-slaves are attorney, civil engineer, commercial pilot, computer operator (with Computer Operation 6 or less), construction worker, factory worker, federal law enforcement, government agent, manager, mechanic, medical doctor, merchant marine, paramedic, professor, psychiatrist, public employee and state/local law enforcement. All military occupations (including astronaut) might as well be treated as wage-slaves—the military has stricter regulations about doing one's job than the corporates. The occupations astronaut, attorney, civil engineer, commercial pilot, manager, medical doctor, professor, psychiatrist and all military officers receive $300 per month times their Education or highest applicable skill, whichever is higher.

True mikes are different, eking out a living with their wits. These people are frequently free-lancers, hiring out to whoever has money. They earn Education or highest applicable skill (whichever is higher) times $500 per month. PC careers appropriate to true mikes are athlete, bodyguard, bounty hunter, clergy, computer programmer (with Computer Operations 7+), criminal, entertainer, gambler, journalist, martial artist, mechanic, medical doctor, mercenary, merchant marine, mystic, paramedic, paraphysicist, politician, private investigator, professor and psychiatrist. Other true mike roles aren't as lucrative—cyborg escapee, drifter, environmentalist, ganger, homeless, prisoner and psychic test subject careers only earn $200 per month per point of Education/highest relevant skill.

Not that the life of a true mike is any easier than the life of a wage-slave. True mikes have to do a lot of work, and their wages aren't as certain as those guaranteed to wage-slaves. Each month, true mikes must see what they have earned, a test vs. Education or highest applicable skill. The task is Average for mikes who have spent a great deal of time at their jobs without significant time lost adventuring (say, no more than one week that month). For mikes who have devoted all their time to work, the task is Average. For mikes who have spent too much time away from the job (over 10 days that month), the task is Difficult. A successful roll means the mike has earned the normal amount. An outstanding success doubles the normal amount. Failure means the mike has earned half the normal amount. Critical failure means the mike earned nothing that month!

Nomenklatura careers are special—it's assumed that the gnome automatically lives at Exec level or higher and has complete insurance, and the gnome's "earnings" are represented by the money available at the beginning of each adventure.

them. When they return home, the referee should make an Average Observation roll for each adventurer. Failure indicates that the PC has spotted an innocent party. Success indicates that a PC has spotted his watchers.

Sometimes the watchers are electronic. If the PCs search their homes and belongings, they find electronic surveillance devices (bugs) everywhere—in their clothes, in their vehicles, in every room. The bugs are well-hidden, requiring a thorough search (a Difficult Observation task, which becomes Easy if the searcher has bug-detecting tools.)

If a PC tries to follow one of his watchers, he must first avoid those watchers—trying to follow the watchers while they're watching is useless. Losing the watchers is a Difficult Stealth task. Trailing the watchers after losing them is a Difficult Stalking task.

An easier way to track the watchers is to have someone else follow them! Following the watchers is an Easy Stalking task if they're watching someone else (but if one of the watched PCs wants to follow someone else's watchers, he'll have to shake off his own first).

The watchers rotate in shifts, with two assigned to each PC at all times. They always keep in touch with someone—calling in on a hand-radio at 15-minute intervals. When they knock off their shift, the watchers are relieved by other watchers or, in some cases, merely trust the electronics for surveillance. Each relieved pair goes to a warehouse/garage on the outskirts of Dreamland, entering through employee doors (or garage doors if driving a vehicle). They stay about half an hour, then leave separately in different vehicles. Trailing a watcher from the warehouse leads the follower to the watcher's residence.

Confronting the watchers is dangerous. They are Experienced NPCs armed with concealed 9mm pistols (use M9 Beretta stats) and one-shot dart pistols (*ROF:* SS *Dam:* 1p4 *Pen:* Nil *Blk:* 0 *Mag:* 1i *SS:* 1 *Brst:* — *Rng:* 5) that fire tranquilizer darts (treat as poison—**Dark Conspiracy**, page 101—but the victim is knocked out for 15–Constitution minutes instead of killed). If the PCs capture and interrogate one of the watchers, they discover that he is just a professional security operative (read: thug

for hire), hired to trail the PCs. That's the limit of the NPC's involvement in the affair. The watchers have been given a radio frequency to report on the PCs' status every quarter-hour. Monitoring the frequency reveals little—the voice on the other end of the line is laconic in the extreme. A radio-direction-finder triangulation can find the location of the voice on the other end, although the sporadic and limited broadcast makes it tougher than usual (an Average Task instead of an Easy one). The location is the building housing the RXPro Ambulance Service.

Research reveals that the warehouse/garage the watchers report to is the headquarters of a private security firm, quite legal and aboveboard. Those at the security agency don't know why they've been hired to follow the PCs; all they know is that the money's good and paid in advance. A sizeable bribe, accompanied by a successful Difficult Persuasion roll, can convince the firm's manager to reveal that they're working for RXPro Ambulance Service. A successful penetration of the firm's computer (a Difficult Computer Operation task) will reveal the same information.

RXPRO

The ambulance service is located in a small building located in Miketown. It specializes in emergency pickups and body removal, and has a contract with the city government for police extraction (i.e., picking up corpses). The employees are thoroughly human, but corrupt—they're paid a lot of money to respond to certain calls, certify them D.O.A. and deliver them to the city morgue.

The service's dispatch is monitoring the PCs' movements and reporting them via computer to an unidentified person or agency.

The employees are Experienced NPCs who will not respond favorably to a bunch of snoopy people asking questions. If the PCs press too much, the employees will be told to capture them right there! The employees have standard stun guns and clubs, as well as lots of medical tape and sedatives to keep people pacified.

EVIL PLAN

The coroner at the local morgue is really a humanoid ET in a good disguise. He has several bands of thugs, all carefully trained and brainwashed, stashed around the city. Each group has weapons that contain injectors—the knives have hollow blades, the guns shoot hollow bullets (with Nil Pen, no matter what caliber), etc.—for a drug that puts the victim in a sort of suspended animation. This drug was originally used by the aliens to survive the long timespans spent in interstellar travel). Unless the victim is killed immediately by the weapon, the drug goes to work and suspends the victim for 24 hours. The suspended victim is alive and somewhat aware (very groggy), but cannot move at all. Metabolism and heart rate decrease to almost nothing, and no oxygen is needed for the next 24 hours—the PC survives on what is already in the bloodstream.

Once drugged and apparently dead, victims are picked up by the RXPro ambulances and brought to the morgue. There the alien coroner does an "autopsy" and removes the brains, not caring that the victims still have enough awareness to feel the operation. The documentation recording the death from violence is then made out, and the bodies are disposed of—while the brains are shipped off to join a mental chorus in a biocomputer.

THE STORY BEHIND THE PLOT

The PCs' part in this mess is not coincidence. The plot to involve them was actually cooked up by Weissmann as a method of solving a problem which arose:

Some years ago, Weissmann accidentally contacted the living computer Legion (Weissmann thought the name appropriate for a multiple-personality intellect) and befriended it. Ever since, Legion has supplied Weissmann with information about its alien masters (the personalities of Legion have no cause to love the aliens and have many reasons to hate them), becoming an invaluable tool in Weissmann's private war on the Minions.

Only a month ago, Legion contacted Weissmann with bad news. The aliens plan to upgrade Legion, making the computer more powerful and diverse, by adding more brain-circuits to the matrix. The consequences for Legion were grave—it feared such disruption of the carefully balanced personality matrix that it would not be able to reintegrate and would cease to exist as distinct if combined entities.

DARK CONSPIRACY

Weissmann couldn't allow this—he could not afford to lose Legion, an event which would utterly cripple his attacks on the Minions. So, if the aliens wanted new victims to add to their computer network, he and Legion would pick them—the most resistant, most independent spirits they could find, while still maintaining the lie of random selection. Legion pretended to agree with the upgrade and dutifully suggested the PCs to the aliens for the augmentation.

The real problem was that neither Legion nor Weissmann knew what sort of agency would be employed to perform the actual task of acquiring the new donors and removing their brains. In order to discover this, Rheinhold had to take the prospective donors into his confidence and enlist them to help thwart the Dark Minions' plan. In doing so, he could uncover and destroy the aliens' plans and possibly acquire some new and active help, allowing him to expand his operations.

If the PCs survive the danger, Weissmann has an offer for them. He will provide them with $4000 per month, plus equipment (only when needed, and then only as a loan). In return, the adventurers agree to his tasks, which can range from haring off to check out the validity of a tabloid headline to doing battle with hellish hordes of Dark Minions.

RHEINHOLD WEISSMANN

Rheinhold Weissmann is an old man. Once he was of middling height and preternatural thinness. Now he is largely confined to his wheelchair, and is wrinkled and bent with age. His hair is nothing more than a ring of white extending from ear to ear—his face is drawn and skull-like, the dark planes of his bone structure emphasizing his bright, fevered eyes.

Weissmann is obsessive. His one goal in

Cost of Living

The cost of living varies in **Dark Conspiracy**, depending on life-style.

The lowest rung of life is *street living*—it costs $100 per month, and the character looks like and lives like street scum, without a roof over his head. Next up is *slum living*, which costs $200 per month. The character lives in condemned buildings, coexisting with rats and roaches. *Mike living*, living in Mike-Town, costs $500 per month. *Exec living* costs $3000 per month and lands the character in low-rank Dreamland (or similar surroundings). The highest rank is *CEO living*. It costs $25,000 per month and is best explained by TV shows starring Robin Leach .

Life-styles cover food, clothing and shelter, plus a few home luxuries like basic entertainment (perhaps a pocket CD for street living and whole holotheaters for CEO living). Extras like transportation and insurance come out of the character's pocket.

Vehicle costs are detailed in **Dark Conspiracy**. Maintenance on vehicles typically costs 2.5% of the list cost per year, with occasional breakdowns that can run to 10% of the car's cost (at the referee's discretion)! Yugos and Tovarishes are prone to suffering such breakdowns.

Wage-slaves have corporate insurance, but true mikes have to provide their own. Medical insurance costs up to $1500 per month—$500 for base accident insurance (not covering combat wounds), another $500 for health insurance and $500 for "extraordinary" insurance (this is in addition to base accident coverage and does cover combat injuries). So why get insurance? Because it covers 80% of the costs involved in accident, injury and sickness.

Medical costs range from the trivial to the colossal. Combat injuries rank near the top. Medical care costs $400 per day—double this if the injury is critical. Healing from a serious wound costs $2000 (five days, assuming that the character is in a hospital), and healing from a critical wound costs $6400.

life is to ferret out and destroy the creatures that are trying to take over the planet. His knowledge on the subject is considerable, thanks to his past experiences and his friendship with the alien computer Legion. Through Legion, he controls a great deal of wealth and hidden power.

Weissmann is confident in his intellect, his power and the sanctity of his mission. He comes across as being even more fearsome and ghoulish than his enemies. This is only a front—he is more human than most people.

Weissmann provides a solid information source, a base of operations and funding for those actively engaged in the war against the Dark Minions.

Level: Elite

Attributes: 3; Intelligence and Education 9

Skills: 6; Observation 9, Willpower 10, Foreboding 8

Initiative: 5

Motivation: Heart Jack: Weissmann is a very wise man, tempered by his years of wandering the darker corners of human (and other) society. He realizes that humanity must fight or die and that most of humanity wouldn't understand. *Spade Ten:* Weissmann is very determined to succeed. The alternative is unacceptable. Ω



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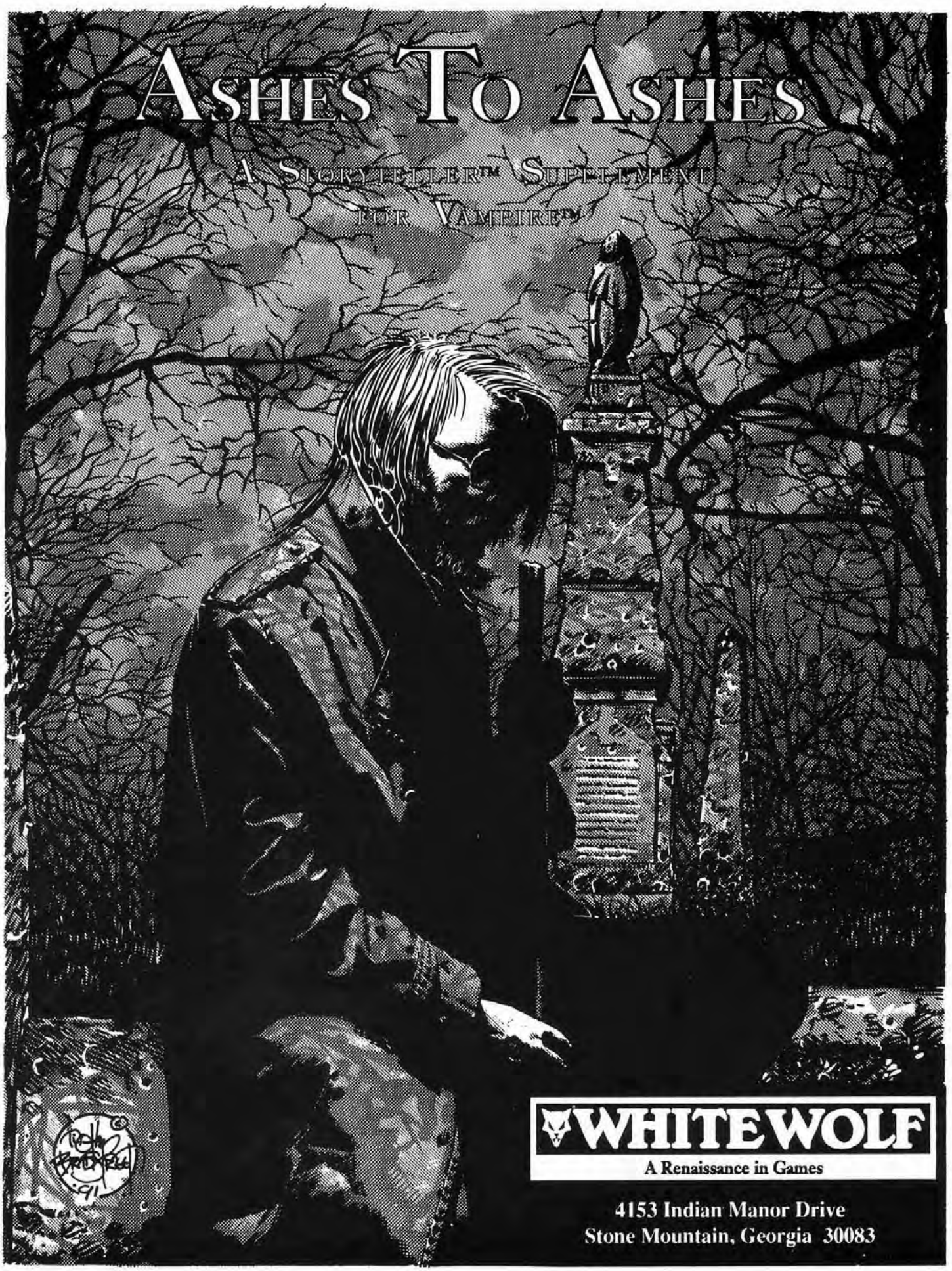
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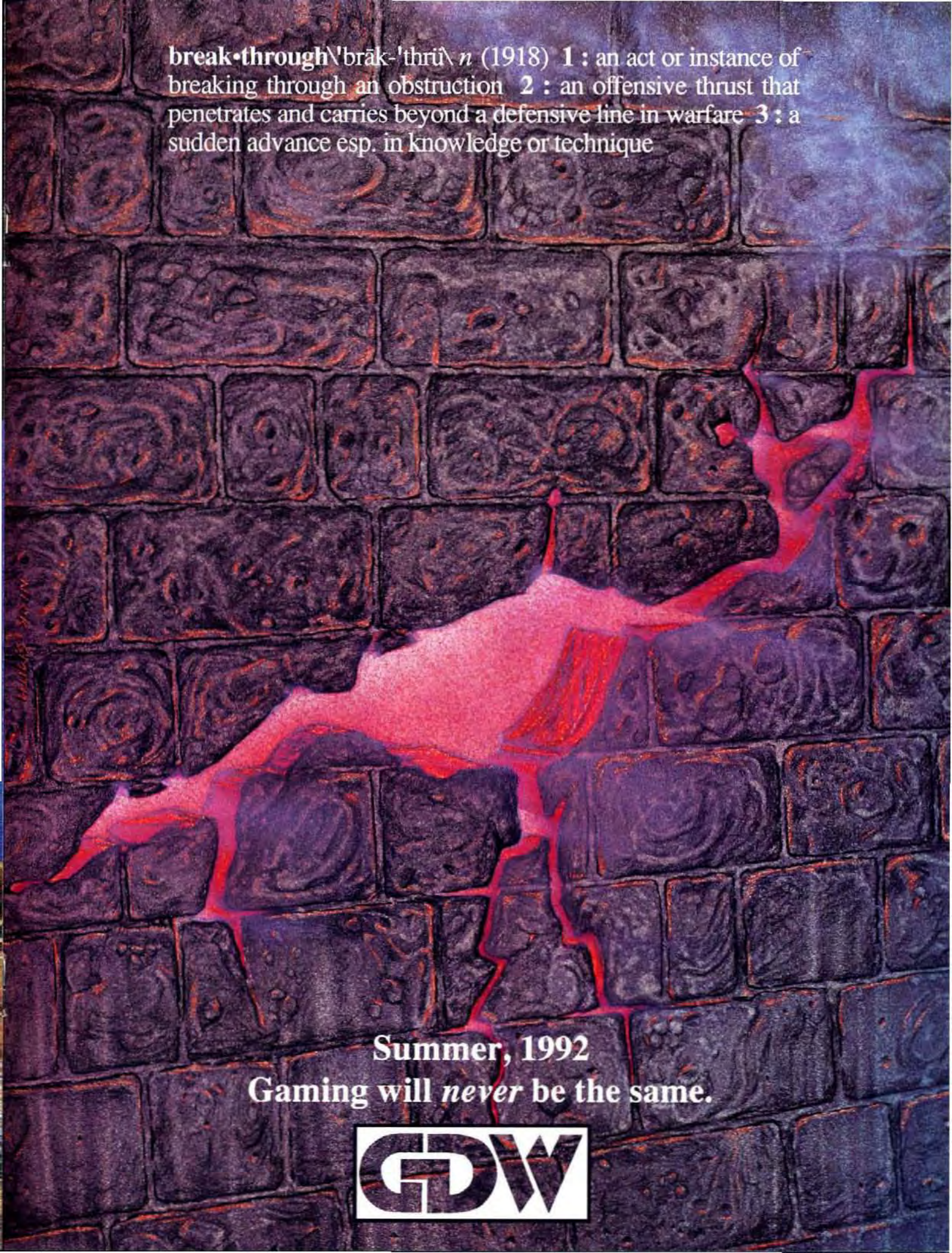
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break•through\'brāk-'thrü\ *n* (1918) **1 :** an act or instance of breaking through an obstruction **2 :** an offensive thrust that penetrates and carries beyond a defensive line in warfare **3 :** a sudden advance esp. in knowledge or technique
Summer, 1992
Gaming will *never* be the same.
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A Solitaire Adventure

By W.G. Armintrout

What *is* a solitaire adventure? It's sort of a hybrid between a regular roleplaying adventure—which can be played as a game with the help of a referee—and an ordinary story, which can't be roleplayed at all. This story has been written so that the reader can play it by himself, making decisions and rolling dice, thereby arriving at different parts of the tale (and various outcomes).

Getting Started: To begin, you'll need a **Space: 1889** player character, along with 2D6, a pencil and a piece of scratch paper.

Designing a PC: The hero of this adventure has been hired as an oceanography assistant. However, he need not know any scientific skills—the job requires more bravery and common sense than book learning. The text assumes that the character is an American, which suggests that characters who are actually British or German are travelling under false credentials.

Entries: The story is broken down into entries, each beginning with a number. At the end of each entry, you may be asked to roll the dice or to choose from several options, or you may be given some sort of instruction. In any case, you'll be told the number of the next entry to turn to. As you play, you'll skip from entry to entry—not in any apparent pattern or order—to discover your adventure. Every time you play, the adventure can turn out differently.

Passwords: You'll be instructed throughout the adventure to write down various passwords It's important that you do so because which code words you have will affect the course of your adventure.

Skill Rolls: Two types of skill rolls may be called for. Any roll not explicitly identified as a "quick roll" uses the skill dice/attribute dice method (see pages 44-45 of **Space: 1889**). If a character is asked to make a roll for a skill in which he has no ability (skill level 0), he may try a quick roll against the attribute on which the skill is based. If he succeeds, he is rewarded with a level of 1 in that skill and may attempt the requested skill roll. Otherwise, the character automatically fails the skill roll. Make a note whenever a skill is raised using this procedure, as experience points must be paid for the skill at the end of the adventure.

Saving Rolls: Players will be called upon to make saving rolls to avoid damage from accidents and other calamities. The save number is: Strength plus Endurance minus Damage. The save number may never be less than 1.

Refresher Entries: Refresher entries, marked with an asterisk, indicate that the PC has a chance to heal from his injuries. Only temporary damage (from unarmed melee attacks and similar events) can be healed at these times, one such wound per refresher

entry. The maximum which can be healed by the use of refresher entries is half the temporary damage (rounded up). There will not be time during the course of the adventure for normal healing, which takes days or weeks.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

Imagine, if you can, that you are a drifting bit of flotsam cast in the midst of one of the great lakes of Africa. Never could a more primitive or bleak aquascape be pictured! No bright rays of sunlight penetrate the glowering deck of clouds overhead. The stained brown waters are troubled only by waves of a feeble and shallow character, and the life which churns in these waters is of an antediluvian type, from an age when beauty had not yet been developed and viciousness was the key to survival. Every fish has a gaping maw studded with teeth of needle sharpness, and the flora of the lake is uniformly green, repellent and of a slimy consistency.

Now upon the horizon you spy a darkness against the clouds, a spot that grows in size and seems to be approaching. In time you see that there is a larger shadow, from which project two towers or structures. What could this be? Is it one of the great beasts of Africa? Could it be some dinosaurian, come to snatch another timeless survivor for its morning repast? A rare beam of light lances through the overcast and illuminates the stranger for all to see. It's a ship—and a fine one! The sun sparkles off her copper stacks and polished railings; off the red, white and blue trimming the deckhouses and portholes; off the water lashed to a white frothing foam by the stern paddlewheel; and off the golden eagle surmounting the flagpole from which Old Glory flies. It is as if a vagrant ship from the modern century has stumbled into a scene from prehistory, and there's no mistaking the uniquely American character of such an occurrence.

The remarkable ship—constructed in the shipyards of Philadelphia, carried to Africa piecemeal by ether flyer and assembled by laborers under the direction of American engineers—was financed by the Destiny Fund, a coalition of progress-minded industrialists (led by Henry Tuttleston Rogers, one of the Standard Oil tycoons). The design is unique and takes into account all the particular circumstances of the African lakes. It is a two-hulled (catamaran) structure of shallow draft, propelled by a large paddlewheel mounted on gimbals to provide maximum maneuverability.

The ship is the *Destiny of Man*, and her crew was selected from the cream of the candidates who applied for each position. You are part of her scientific crew, a sort of aquatic expert, an explorer of the deep. Your job is to descend in a bathysphere to collect information and otherwise aid Professor Collingsworth, the elderly chief of oceanography. Try a quick roll against your Science skill or Intellect level (whichever is highest).

- If you succeed, turn to 93.
- If you fail, turn to 29.

1. You see the creature emerge head-on from the darkness, boring straight for the bathysphere. Its general structure is eel-like, but the head is triangular, with three bony projections and dark globular eyes on short stalks. This creature must be nearly half the size of the *Destiny* herself. Erase the password STRONGHEART from your sheet.

- If you have the password STYGIAN, turn immediately to 97.

Otherwise, try an Intellect roll against a difficulty level of 12.

- If you succeed, turn to 82.
- If you fail, turn to 97.

2. You awaken to a scene of sparks and flame. The crystals of the cavern are on fire, melting to black stalactites of slag. "The Devourer," says Mnoth, staring upward. "It lived inside the Activator. We brought our enemy with us all along!" Turn to 51.

3. "Oh, come now. I thought you'd be a better guest than this." Mnoth claps, and you feel invisible hands propel you into the abyss. You fall through the air until you reach the Aquaceph's side, where the invisible hands again break your descent. "There, now—you've made me behave badly," says your host. "I'll not forget." Turn to 81.

4. You are thrown about the interior of the diving chamber, with sufficient force to break your limbs or cave in your skull. Try a saving roll against a Damage level of 4.

- If you fail, you receive a (temporary) wound.
- If you are dead, your adventure is over.
- If you are unconscious, turn to 34.
- In all other cases, turn to 18.

5. "Of course," says the Aquaceph, "if we'd known who you were, we'd not have let the beast interfere with you." Mnoth claps, and the chamber darkens. A single beam of light shines down from the ceiling, and in that illumination appears an object—the banner which President Harrison gave for this expedition. "The flag," you say. "And the sign," says Mnoth, pointing to the great seal of the United States, then removing the copper band and pointing to the inscription. To your amazement, both share a common element—the symbol of the eye-topped pyramid. "We know who you are. You are one of the People." Turn to 108.

6. If you have the passwords STUPEFIED, CONFOUNDED or STYGIAN, you cannot take a picture—return to 66 and choose again. Otherwise, there's a satisfying click as the camera captures the instant of the attack on a photographic plate. Hopefully, this'll provide useful clues when developed, assuming you survive this dive. Make a note—you have the password PERILOUS. If you already have this password, give it to yourself again. Turn to 18.

7. Mnoth is trapped beneath fallen stonework. "There," gasps the Aquaceph, pointing toward an archway. "That's the exit. Save yourself!"

- If you try to free the Aquaceph, turn to 105.
- If you abandon Mnoth and take the exit, turn to 27.

8. You spot a strange-looking, multi-limbed shadow on the wall behind you—a deep, dense darkness that pulses slowly. Even as you look, the shadows leaps toward you. Try an Agility roll to avoid the hurtling menace. The difficulty level is 12 (Difficult) plus 2 for every box checked off at entry 53 (when you turn there, be sure not to lose your place here). However, the adjusted difficulty level cannot be higher than 20.

- If you succeed, turn to 30.
- If you fail, turn to 46.

9. "You are mine!" says an exultant Shadow, executing a mocking bow. "With your physical body dead, your mind shall dwell here in the Activator with mine, serving me until the very bowels of the sun turn dark and cold." His metallic laughter rings in your ears. Your adventure is over.

10. From your earlier glimpse of the underwater ruins, you realize that the bathysphere must be perched on the crest of the pyramid. How odd.

- If you now open the hatch, turn to 71.
- If you respond by tapping back, turn to 95.
- If you want to do none of these, turn to 58.

11. Henry Tuttleston Rogers, the directing officer of the Destiny Fund, visits the ship often, taking a special interest in oceanography and your research. He's a tall man who dresses with understated elegance, unafraid to dirty his hands examining the various oceanographic apparatuses (after he removes his silk gloves, that is). "Let there be no doubt of it," he has said, on more than one occasion. "The research conducted on this voyage and the discoveries you are about to make may determine whether our mother republic continues to advance to the forefront of the industrial nations, or whether our progress is stinted or constrained." Make a note—you have the password SECLORUM.

- If you have the password IRRADIANCE, turn to 103.

Otherwise, turn to 22.

12. The camera has torn from its moorings and shattered, destroying your chance to take any further pictures of the African deeps. Make a note—you have the password CONFOUNDED.

- If you have the password PERILOUS, turn to 77.
- If not, turn to 94.

13. Mnoth is free—and you have the password SAVIOR. Turn to 27.

14. You discover yourself face to face with a stranger. He is tall and slender, dressed like a prince of Araby—with a turban tied about his skull, and a queer cloak that wraps about his shoulders and attaches to the backs of his pointed slippers. His tunic leaves his legs and arms bare, revealing flesh tanned coppery-red and muscles toned by exercise. His clothes seem to be made of some sort of kid leather, white and supple. He wears a jeweled bracer, and a large crystal pendant is suspended from a necklace about his throat. The most impressive things about him, besides his Adonis-like build and the metallic hue of his skin, are his eyes. They seem to absorb you in a glance, drinking you in and pouring you out again, laughing at you and dissecting you and romancing you all at once. "Welcome to SubAfrica," he says in flawless English. His voice is deep and powerful, and the words seem to march regally one by one across the air. "I am Mnoth. I am an Aquaceph." Turn to 37.

15. The impact knocks you to the floor, leaving you momentarily breathless and dizzy. Try a saving roll against a Damage level of 4. If you fail, you receive a (temporary) wound.

- If you are unconscious, turn to 25.
- If you are dead, your adventure is over.
- In all other cases, turn to 7.

16. Abruptly, you feel an odd tingling sensation. Try a quick roll against your Endurance level.

- If you succeed, turn to 60.
- If you fail, turn to 85.

17. "Quite the question," says Mnoth, licking the juice from a speared vegetable, then replacing it on the plate. "The Acquisitor deduced your presence from the actions of the Guardian, prompting the Activator into motion in time to save your ship from diving into the Abyss. Your derelict was elevatored in on the radiant wave, and I was awakened to deal with you. Incidentally, my congratulations on surviving your encounter with the Guardian. It's a horrific entity, but it serves its purpose well."

- If you have the password SECLORUM, turn to 5.
- If not, turn to 108.

18. The leviathan of the African deeps has momentarily retreated, but for how long? In the meantime, you assess the damage it's just done. Roll 1D6 and find the instructions below corresponding to the number you rolled. If the box following it is unmarked, cross it out, then follow the directions which immediately follow. If the box is already crossed out, roll over.

- ☐ 1: Turn to 84.
- ☐ 2: Turn to 12.
- ☐ 3: Turn to 102.
- ☐ 4: Turn to 61.
- ☐ 5: Turn to 10.
- ☐ 6: Turn to 48.

If all of the boxes have been marked out, turn to 94.

19. The room quivers, and for a moment you fear that the end has come for buried SubAfrica. But then you see the panels sliding away in front of you, revealing viewing ports that show the lake—and your rapid ascent. You have escaped! But your exultation is short-lived. The alien submersible shudders, and the crystals dim out entirely. The chamber is suddenly as still as the tomb.

- If you have the password SAVIOR, turn to 31.
- If not, turn to 112.

20. Try a quick roll against your Theatrics skill or Charisma level, whichever is highest, to see if you can fool Mnoth.

- If you succeed, turn to 41.
- If you fail, turn to 65.

21. There's also a chance here to meet many of the so-called movers and shakers of American industry, the bigwigs who have financed this project and who visit (arriving on the biweekly ether flyer) to learn of progress and tour the ship. Professor Collingsworth often delegates you to give such visitors the tour of the bathysphere chamber, as he dislikes to be interrupted. Try a quick roll against your Charisma level.

- If you succeed, turn to 11.
- If you fail, turn to 50.

22. At last, the *Destiny of Man* reaches that part of the lake where Professor Collingsworth has determined to make the first deep dives. To the surprise of the project's skeptics, the voyage so far has been unmarred by the savages which are supposed to ravage central Africa. At any rate, the twin Nordenfelts and the one-pounder main gun should be sufficient to deter the most aggressive tribal chieftain. The bathysphere is a globe, fabricated of steel, from which various tools, tanks and apparatuses are suspended: an oxygen-arc lamp above the main viewing port, a 10-foot manipulating arm linked by gears to handles within, and chambers designed to automatically sample the lake water at different depths or to scrape the lake bottom for mineral specimens. The key to lowering the diving sphere into the depths and then recovering it is a powerful winch, mounted between the twin hulls of the ship. The bathysphere is a dead weight, entirely dependent upon the steel cable for its return to the surface. A supply of compressed air is capable of sustaining the single operator for up to 50 hours submerged.

- If you have the password SECLORUM, turn to 62.
- If not, turn to 80.

23.* When you open your eyes, you find yourself sprawled on the floor, held in the arms of the Aquaceph. "You have not lost," says Mnoth. "The destruction has already begun." "What?" you ask. "Your battle with the Devourer gave me the time to clear my mind of the barriers planted there by my enemy ages ago. With my understanding clear, I took action even as you fought him. Do you see? The Devourer dwells inside the Activator and has preyed on my race until I am the only one left alive. And now I have turned off the Activator, a step which can never be undone." Turn to 51.

24. "I have caught you! You are real! We are alive!" Mnoth bursts into tears and collapses on the floor. A booted foot kicks against the hard stone. "There is reality, and I am not yet wandering in the Abyss. Thank you, foreign one." Turn to 53.

25. Time runs out. With a howling roar, the lake waters rush in to claim SubAfrica. You and Mnoth die together, and the ruins of SubAfrica are your tomb. Your adventure is over.

26. "I slept for centuries," says Mnoth, almost oblivious to your presence. "My mind is clouded, and the memories fall out of their ranks. I shall show you the couch of timelessness and much more, and you shall stay and be with me for eternity."

- If you wish to disagree, turn to 101.

Otherwise, turn to 53.

27. The archway leads to a brief hallway, then into a circular room crowded with three large chairs and an altar of crystals. How can this be an exit?

- If you have the password SAVIOR, turn immediately to 38.

Otherwise, you have a choice:

- If you wish to try to activate the crystals yourself, turn to 49.
- If you want to return to rescue Mnoth, turn to 7.

28. "You may ask me a question," says Mnoth, chewing on a meat-wrapped vegetable. You might ask:

- "Can you help me return to the surface?" Turn to 79. ☐

- "How did I get here?" Turn to 17. ☐
- "How did you learn to speak English?" Turn to 45. ☐
- "What are you? Are you human?" Turn to 74. ☐
- "What is the Activator?" Turn to 63. ☐
- "Where am I?" Turn to 96. ☐
- If you think you might forget which questions you've asked, check off the box after each question when you ask it.
- If you don't wish to ask any more questions, turn to 108.

29. The elderly professor is a hard man to work for, peremptory in his demands and unforgiving of errors. He also works odd hours, keeping you at work for 20 hours at a stretch when he's investigating something of particular interest. "Africa could be the savior of Earth," he tells you repeatedly, when your own enthusiasm flags. "Here's an undeveloped continent, potentially with vast mineral riches waiting to be exploited. Do you understand what it would mean to have unlimited resources? Prices would plummet; there'd be abundance for both rich and poor; and the surplus wealth could be invested in science and research. It'd be a millenium, mark my words!" Turn to 73.

30. Mnoth leads you on the run down a series of passageways. "Stop the invader. I command it!" shouts the Aquaceph several times, clapping simultaneously. Nothing appears to happen, and, glancing back, you see a pulsing blackness following several paces behind.

'Our only hope is the Activator," says your host. "It has always been our defense, and only it can save us."

'How can you battle a shadow?" you ask.

"It is much more than a shadow," replies Mnoth. "It is the hungering of the void, the viciousness which gnaws at the fabric of civilization." The two of you sprint through an archway, entering again the cavern of the Activator. Mnoth steps to the altar and begins to stroke the crystals, crooning something in a language without consonants. The pursuing shadow pauses in the entrance, gathering into a new form—a repellent, throbbing, humanoid shape.

"We meet again," speaks the Shadow, forming a voice out of gravel and sand.

The Aquaceph smiles, just as an encasing illumination springs up from the altar to protect both of you. "I know you not, Devourer."

"You are mistaken." The enemy gestures, and the safeguarding illumination pales. Then the Shadow leaps toward you with a speed impossible to escape. Make a note—your password is ALTAR. Turn to 46.

31. "SubAfrica has died," says the familiar voice of your host. "And the Activator with it. What? I feel myself pouring away!" You rush to the Aquaceph's side, but not before Mnoth collapses. The skin is clammy to the touch, and the pulse is weak and ragged. Then the eyelids open. "Do I know you?" asks Mnoth, with a puzzled look. Turn to 112.

32. When you open your eyes, you find yourself sprawled on the floor, held in the arms of the Aquaceph. "The Devourer," says Mnoth, staring upward. "It lived inside the Activator. We brought our enemy with us all along!" Turn to 51.

33. In an instant, the steel diving sphere is crushed by the pressure of the depths. Your adventure is over.

34.* A tapping noise awakens you. The bathysphere has ceased to move, and the interior is illuminated by bright light streaming in from outside. As you recover your senses, the metallic pinging comes again—from the hatch. Do you:

- Open the hatch? Turn to 71.
- Peer out the viewing port? Turn to 109.
- Tap back? Turn to 95.
- Do nothing? Turn to 58.

35. "Pardon me if I speak my mind," says Mnoth, suddenly sitting at your side. "Among your sort, are you considered an attractive specimen? Don't answer. Let me decide." The Aquaceph stares into your eyes, and you again feel the queer sensation of being drawn out and then replenished. "You stir me," Mnoth says, then rises. "So what more will you ask of me?" Turn to 53.

36. Try a quick roll against your Agility level, in order to grab a rope and use it to tie yourself down to the chair. Subtract one from the number rolled for every box (if any) checked off below.

- If you succeed, turn to 90.
- If you fail, check off one of the boxes below, then turn to 18.

☐☐☐☐☐

37. "We must leave at once," says Mnoth, leading you at once toward a pit in the middle of the plaza where the bathysphere has landed. "The Activator cannot be left untended for long, not at this stage." So saying, the Aquaceph jumps into the pit—but instead of plunging precipitously to a sudden death, Mnoth floats downward at a gentle pace. "Follow me," commands the Aquaceph.

- If you jump into the pit, turn to 81.
- If you insist on asking questions first, turn to 54.
- If you do none of the above, turn to 3.

38. "Place yourself in one of those chairs," commands the Aquaceph, turning to the altar and its crystals. "I shall command it to rise to the surface." Turn to 19.

39. At these depths, the character of the lake life is very different from that which you glimpsed before. There are few "fish" down here, not of any expected kinds—the creatures you see are wispy, as if constructed from panels of silk glued together with jelly. One rotates past the viewing port like a paddlewheel, using expanding pockets of tissue to collect and then expel lake water. When the lake floor comes into view, you can scarcely restrain the gasp that rises to your lips. There's some kind of ruin laid out on the bottom of this lake. Your eye is caught by a titanic pyramid constructed from what appears to be a greenish steel, surrounded by lesser structures of pastel hues. There are colonnades, stepped stairways, plazas and roadways, all curiously clean of silt and debris. The entire community rests on the edge of a precipice, which leads further down into the inky depths. In fact, the only reason you can see as much as you can is that you view it through some kind of illuminated haze, as though there is a mist or fog in the water between you and the city. Make a note—you have the password ENLIGHTENED. If you don't have the password CONFOUNDED, this is worth a picture—give yourself the password VALIANT. Turn to 16.

40. If you have the password MORTIFY, you know what you must do—turn immediately to 100. Otherwise, roll 1D6.

- If the roll is even, turn to 76 (if you have the password DIRE) or to 64 (if you don't have that password).
- If the roll is odd, turn to 1 (if you have the password STRONGHEART but don't have the password DISASTROUS) or to 97 (in any other situation).

41.* "I like it when you're cooperative," says the Aquaceph. Turn to 8.

42. "I tire of this. Be still," commands the Aquaceph, clapping. You freeze where you are, held by powers beyond your detection or resistance. Mnoth gazes into your eyes from inches away, then reaches out to touch your cheek. "Reality continues, and we must be part of it," sighs your host. Turn to 53.

43. The Aquaceph smiles broadly and returns to dining. "I want you to know that you have pleased me mightily, strange one," says Mnoth. Turn to 108.

44. You've just been caught "totally by surprise." Turn to 97.

45. "This is due to the Activator," says Mnoth. "It is both the power and the essence of our civilization, wandering one. I can speak with you because both of us have been indexed by its crystalline rays. As the

diviner of the chords of harmony, I am the one who stands duty in the hall of mastery." Turn to 108.

46. You have been transplanted to a dreamscape. A rod of flickering flame is in one of your hands, and a shield of translucent crystal is strapped to another arm. The sky above is a pale and pearlescent white, and the surface on which you stand is of a midnight ebony hue, crisscrossed with lines of an electric and flickering silver. Two figures emerge from the mist. One is Mnoth, bound and unarmed. Another is a faceless figure of fire, armed with a rod of blue fire and a shield of jade. It is the Shadow. "Duel with me, mortal one," husks your enemy. "And if I win, you shall serve me in the Halls of SubAfrica for all eternity."

"And if I win?" you ask. There is no reply but laughter.

Resolve the battle using standard melee combat rules, with these alterations: Your Intellect level is the number of actions you may take per turn, your hit dice, and your hit number. When dodging or blocking, roll versus Intellect rather than Agility—the rods have a blocking modifier of –1. The Shadow has an Intellect of 4, with 10 hit points.

- If you defeat the Shadow, turn to 2 (if your password is ALTAR) or to 32 (if you don't have this password).
- If you are knocked unconscious, turn to 23.
- If you are killed, turn to 9.

47. You release the pressure switches on the hatch, listening for the telltale hiss of invading air—but there's nothing. Rotating the valve wheel, you open the hatch and step out.

- If your PC is male, turn to 99.
- If your PC is female, turn to 14.

48. The diving sphere lurches—harder and sharper than it has previously, jerking you toward the ceiling. Then you feel it begin to fall. The cable linking the bathysphere to the surface has snapped, condemning you to the depths of the African lake. Make a note—you have the password DIRE. Turn to 97.

49. Try an Intellect roll to decipher the pattern of these control stones. The difficulty level is formidable (target level 16).

- If you succeed, turn to 19. Otherwise, check off one of the boxes below and roll one die.
- If the number rolled is greater than the number of marked-out boxes, turn to 25.
- If not, you may try another Intellect roll, or you may choose to return to save Mnoth (turn to 7).

☐☐☐☐☐☐

50. It's common knowledge that this expedition has been financed by the Destiny Fund, a coalition of progress-minded industrialists. The chief of these is Henry Tuttleston Rogers, who made his fortune working with one of the Standard Oil companies. According to the rumor mill, Rogers isn't the only oil tycoon with an investment—J.D. Rockefeller is said to have a large shareholding, although he's not taken an active role in the corporation. Whether Andrew Carnegie (of Carnegie Steel) and George Washington Vanderbilt (grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt, the railroad magnate) are also investors are subjects of heavy speculation. Turn to 22.

51. A violent quaking shakes the building. "What's that?" you ask. "SubAfrica is now doomed," says the Aquaceph. "The Activator kept us safe from the pressure of the lake. Very shortly now, the power will fail, and we will be one with the fishes." "Not if I can help it," you say, propelling Mnoth into the passageway. "There's got to be a way out of here. Find it!" The last inhabitant of SubAfrica leads you again through the warren of tunnels as the building quivers more and more violently. Smoke clouds many of the tunnels, and the wall crystals are dimming. Then, with a crash, a portion of the ceiling caves in. Try a quick roll against your Agility level to avoid being crushed.

- If you succeed, turn to 7.
- If you fail, turn to 15.

52. Try an Endurance roll to avoid the effects of the battery vapors accumulating within the diving sphere. Use the difficulty level shown below, adjacent to the uppermost unmarked-out box.

☐ Easy (target level 4).
☐ Moderate (target level 8).
☐ Moderate (target level 8).
☐ Difficult (target level 12).
☐ Difficult (target level 12).
☐ Formidable (target level 16).
☐ Impossible (target level 20).

- If you fail, turn to 85.

Otherwise, cross out the uppermost unmarked-out box, and:

- If you have the password AQUEOUS, turn to 78.
- If you have the password DISASTROUS, turn to 70.
- If you have the password STYGIAN or DIRE, turn to 40.
- If you have the password STRONGHEART, turn to 1.
- If you have more than one of these passwords, follow the directions for the first one you have on the list.
- If you have none of the above, turn to 97.

53. Try an Observation roll. Use the difficulty level shown below, adjacent to the uppermost unmarked-out box.

☐ Impossible (target level 20).
☐ Formidable (target level 16).
☐ Formidable (target level 16).
☐ Difficult (target level 12).
☐ Difficult (target level 12).
☐ Moderate (target level 8).
☐ Moderate (target level 8).

- If you succeed, turn to 107.

Otherwise, cross out the uppermost unmarked-out box, and turn to 28.

54. "There is no time for discussion," says Mnoth, still descending.

- If you persist, turn to 3.
- If you meekly follow, turn to 81.

55. "How do I know that you exist?" The Aquaceph stalks the chamber, pacing in disjointed steps, pausing only to hurl some new thought or consider an enigma. "I will touch you!" your host suddenly cries. Mnoth rushes toward you, stretching open fingers toward your face.

- If you flee or resist, turn to 98.
- If not, turn to 72.

56. "Perhaps I could come with you." From a pouch within the white cloak, Mnoth produces a familiar volume—your copy of *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.* "I would like to meet the author of this book. I think we would have a lot to say to one another. Do you conceive of what it is like to slumber for an age, then to awaken in a time and place in which your own beginnings have been forgotten? What of Therra, Hespadon and Mure? My heart pines to see again the pavilions of Mamelar, to be stirred by the marches of legions on their way to war, to beat in time with the cadence of activated crystals drawing the stars together. So much time, compressed into one mortality." The Aquaceph is silent for a time, then dips a hand into the pot and sips from the broth. "I forget myself. My apologies." Turn to 108.

57. As you wait for a particularly interesting specimen to swim into focus—a curious trifinned worm with a double tail and lavender scales—you catch an instant of movement out of the corner of your eyes and feel the bathysphere gently quiver. Something's out there. Something large and curious. Turn to 97.

58. The rapping ceases, and for a time there is silence. Then, abruptly, the bathysphere shakes. The valve wheel which seals the main hatch begins to spin as the door is unlocked from the outside.

- If your PC is male, turn to 99.
- If your PC is female, turn to 14.

59. The Aquaceph suddenly jumps up, with a face as pale as ivory. "The Devourer!" gasps Mnoth. "We must flee!"

- If you instantly run for the exit, turn to 104.
- If you first turn to see what Mnoth sees, turn to 8.



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60. You feel as though your spine has turned into a tuning fork. Bizarre vibrations stream through your body, pouring strange colors into your eyes and producing sounds like wind chimes and organ tones. Struggling to bring your eyes into focus, you stare at the lake bottom and see a beam of kaleidoscopic light flowing directly toward you. The strange sensations threaten to overcome your self-control. Turn to 85.

61. One of the valves gives way, and in an instant you are ankle-deep in cold water. The jet sprays from the burst fixture with unbelievable force, driven by the weight of tons of lake between you and the surface, rebounding off the far wall of the sphere and sending its stinging droplets everywhere. Make a note—you have the password DISASTROUS. Turn to 94.

62. Professor Collingsworth has arranged for a simple ceremony before your first exploratory descent. Captain Johns is present to shake your hand and give a brief speech, and other notables come forth to wish you well or prophecy on the importance of this endeavor. One of the oil men steps forward, carrying a pole and a flag. "Other eyes than our own are watching the events of this day," he announces. "Mr. Rogers, who is convinced of the importance of this exploration, has been in contact with President Harrison on behalf of the Destiny Fund. The US government has in turn bestowed upon us this token of the nation's favor—a banner to be planted on the lake floor at the point of today's deepest descent." The flag, stiffened by wax and other preservatives, is emblazoned with the great seal of the United States. After conferring with Professor Collingsworth, the pole and flag are placed in the tool hopper next to the manipulating arm. Turn to 68.

63. "I am patient with you, but only so far," says the Aquaceph, lancing into the soup pot and drawing forth a thin-shelled animal like a crab, transfixed by the dividers. The meat is sucked from within the shell with gusto. "Know that the Activator is the source of energy and knowledge, custodian of all that we are and ever shall be. I am its servant. That is all." Turn to 108.

64. You have escaped from the clutches of death and fate! The leviathan of the African deeps has departed. Meanwhile, your companions on the surface have detected your peril from the sudden tugs and pulls on the cable, and are reeling you back in. Congratulations—your adventure is over! (Please play again to discover the complications you missed this time.)

65. "You don't understand, do you?" says the Aquaceph. Sighing, Mnoth claps, and you find yourself avidly devouring the bizarre meal. "Don't choke on your food." Turn to 28.

66. Note:

- If you wish to take this moment to strap yourself down, turn to 36.
- If you would like to get a good look at the creature attacking the bathysphere, turn to 75.
- If you want to take a photograph, turn to 6.
- If you wish to do none of the above, turn to 18.

67. "All the dead," sighs Mnoth, staring at nothing. When you start to speak, the Aquaceph motions for silence. "Let me mourn in silence, unknown one. I am suddenly in full remembrance. Once these passages were full of people—living people—and SubAfrica was like floral Hespadon! Where are they now? Have the Devourers come? If so, where can they lair? Never mind. Erase my statements from your awareness, observer. They have no bearing but for myself." Turn to 53.

68. Collingsworth inspects the seal of the pressure hatch, then signals the winch operator to begin the descent. As the brown-green waters rise above the level of your viewing port, you are sealed off from the world of your companions. Until you again rise from the waters, there is no way to signal your discoveries or distresses. The descent to the lake floor will take several hours, during which there is little for you to do other than to record the readings of the dials and pressure meters in the logbook. Your other task is photography. Carefully handling the delicate glass plates, you load the camera, then look for marine life worthy of being caught by the lens. As the depth increases, the light decreases, forcing you to ignite the oxygen-arc lamp. Its bluish light, fed by a constant draft of pure oxygen gas, seems to attract as many inquisitive fish as it frightens away. Try a quick roll against your Observation skill level.

- If you succeed, turn to 57.
- If you fail, turn to 44.

69. Try a quick roll against your Strength level to resist the strange forces which the Aquaceph has called upon.

- If you succeed, turn to 89.
- If failure is your prize, you buckle to your knees—turn to 43.

70. There's only one way to stop this leak from filling the bathysphere—you've got to close the shut-off valve. Against the pressure of tons of water, however, it will take a Herculean effort to force the emergency valve closed. Try a Strength roll against a Difficulty level of 12 as you attempt to close the valve and save the bathysphere. If you succeed, the leak is stopped—erase the password DISASTROUS from your record sheet. However, if you fail, you must check off one of the boxes below.

- If all the above boxes have been checked off, turn to 87.
- Otherwise, turn to 40 (if you have the password STYGIAN or DIRE) or to 7 (if you don't have those passwords).

□□□□

71. Try a quick roll against your Intellect level.

- If you succeed, turn to 86.
- If you fail, turn to 47.

72. "You don't even run," says your host, returning to the table. "Are you a tame pet, to be ordered about so easily? Of course you are real—and so am I. Eat." Turn to 53.

73. When you are not in the company of Professor Collingsworth, you have the opportunity to meet others travelling on the *Destiny*—crewmembers, fellow scientists and illustrious passengers. Try a quick roll against your Social level.

- If you succeed, turn to 83.
- If you fail, turn to 111.

74. "Surely you don't expect me to answer such a bold question." Mnoth leans to lap from the simmering pot of soup. "Ask something more sociable." Turn to 108.

75. Pressing yourself against the thick pane of the view port, you stare into the murky waters, trying to get a good look at whatever is out there. Try an Observation skill roll. The task difficulty level is 8 (Moderate)—unless you have the password STYGIAN, in which case the difficulty is 16 (Formidable).

- If you succeed, turn to 92.
- If you fail, you see nothing—turn to 18.

76. At last, the lake beast swims away, but your troubles are not over. The bathysphere is still descending, with nothing to stop it but the ooze and muck thousands of fathoms beneath you. And there's no guaranteeing that the steel shell can withstand the pressures of such a dive. Fortunately for you, the engineers who designed this diving chamber did their work well. The steel creaks and groans, but keeps you safe and alive all the way to the bottom.

- If you would like to switch the oxygen-arc lamp back on, and if you don't have the password STUPEFIED, turn to 88.
- If you leave the lamp off (if you have the password STUPEFIED, you have no choice)—turn to 16.

77. Roll once for each PERILOUS password you have. If you roll an even number, the plate with which you took your photograph of the leviathan has been destroyed with the camera—erase the password. If you roll an odd number, the plate is intact. Turn to 94.

78. Roll 1D6 to determine whether the weakened viewing port stands up to the pressures of the leviathan's attacks.

• If you roll a 6, turn to 33.

Otherwise:

• If you have the password DISASTROUS, turn to 70.

• If you have the password STYGIAN or DIRE, turn to 40.

• If you have the password STRONGHEART, turn to 1.

• If you have more than one of these passwords, follow the directions for the first one you have on the list.

• If you have none of the above, turn to 97.

79. The Aquaceph laughs long and hard. "To the surface? To the top of the waters of shelter?"

• If you have the password BROWSER, turn to 56.

Otherwise, turn to 106.

80. There is little ceremony—you walk onto the scaffolding between the hulls; the captain shakes your hand and wishes you luck; and then you step within the sphere. Turn to 68.

81. The Aquaceph leads you through a warren of pits and passageways, all drearily alike to your bewildered gaze. Everywhere is the orange-streaked stone, a sort of marbled granite. There are neither carvings nor decorations, except for the colored crystals—most of the same size as the one Mnoth wears—which stud the walls near archways and intersections. You see no other people. Whenever you try to question your host, the Aquaceph refuses to make any reply other than one of concern for "the Activator."

At last, you are led into a great chamber, with entrances at each of the cardinal corners. Catwalks lead from each opening to a central platform, suspended without benefit of pillars or columns from above or below. Mnoth strides to an altar, and touches the crystals embedded there in a quick and precise pattern. Every wall of this chamber—a veritable rococo chapel of strange technology—is encrusted with crystalline structures, obviously not natural. Lights flicker in the depths of some, while other quartzian masses lie clouded and dark.

"The Activator has been satisfied," announces Mnoth, bowing and then retreating from before the altar. "Come, let us take nourishment, and you can learn more of myself and this place." Pursuing another catwalk, the Aquaceph leads you rapidly to a chamber where a table and benches await. In a pot of gleaming blue-copper boils a soup, without benefit of a visible fire, and red-veined steaks and brown roots in a syrup steam on a pair of plates. The eating utensils are thick spearing hooks, joined at the blunt ends like a pair of dividers. "Eat up," says Mnoth, "or I'll be very unhappy. You must keep up your health, you know."

• If you eat the food, turn to 41.

• If you only pretend to eat the food, turn to 20.

• If you refuse to dine, turn to 65.

82. Suddenly, it's obvious to you—the creature is attacking the oxygen-arc lamp! It must be attracted by the light!

• If you wish to switch off the light, turn to 100.

• If not, turn to 97.

83. How you come to meet and befriend Mark Twain, the humorist who recently wrote the very popular *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, is entirely a product of fortune: You have no idea who he was, and finding him inspecting the bathysphere, you cuss him out royally. It turns out that the author was being given a tour of the ship and wandered off on his own. Shortly, you find yourself explaining to him the workings of the oceanographic devices, in which he seemed to take singular delight. He is kind enough to give you an autographed copy of his latest book—entitled *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*—and you enthusiastically read it whenever you can. Make a note—you have the password BROWSER. Turn to 21.

84. A furious bubbling from beneath the deck warns you that the battery cells have cracked, spilling their acids into the bilge. An acrid scent fills the air, making your eyes smart and hurting the back of your throat. You have the password SHROUD. Turn to 94.

85. You lapse into an unconscious state. Turn to 34.

86. Hold on a second, you think. What about the pressure? Even if there's air out there, it should be compressed under thousands of fathoms of lake—enough to rip this diving machine to shreds the instant you crack the seal. However, when you check the pressure gauge, it tells you that the air down here is at standard air pressure. Is it registering properly?

• If you persist in opening the hatch, turn to 47.

• If you'd rather not, return to 34 and select a new option.

87. The bathysphere has filled with water—you drown long before the rising pressure crushes you. Your adventure is over.

88. Make a note—you have the password MORTIFY. Roll 1D6.

• On a roll of 5 or 6, turn to 97.

• Otherwise, turn to 39.

89. The veins stand out from your skin, and sweat beads on your brow, but the mysterious forces have met their match against human willpower. "Call off your eldritch demons," you tell Mnoth. "A free man shall never kneel."

"I see," The Aquaceph gazes on you with folded arms. "I was wrong about you, splendid one." The invisible vise releases you. Turn to 43.

90. You've strapped yourself in. Make a note—if you are called on to make any further Agility rolls to keep your laket, substitute a difficulty level of 4 (Easy). If you ever fail this roll, you come untied and must strap yourself in again. Turn to 18.

91. "We cannot dine on *sassem niya* without *topari*," says Mnoth in agitation, jumping up from the table. "Matri! Bulak! Attend me!" The Aquaceph claps several times, but no one comes. "I do not comprehend," mutters Mnoth, again sitting, "where all the others have gone. Am I alone, then, at last?" Turn to 53.

92. There, for an instant, gliding past the porthole—you see a fin larger than the entire bathysphere, veined with blue and covered with warty knobs entirely unlike the scales of a fish. Then you glimpse something trailing after the creature. a tendril, a tentacle or a feeler? As it drags across the outside of the sphere, you hear a rasping hiss, as if the tendril is studded with teeth, barbs or some other abrasive. Make a note—you have the password STRONGHEART. Turn to 18.

93. In your months aboardship, Collingsworth has come to respect you—he says you remind him of the sharper students he used to teach at Dartmouth. He's even confided a secret to you: "It's all a crock," he bursts out one night when you and he are poring over the oceanographic charts. "We're not here to search for oil and minerals. Here's what we're really after."

From within a locked portfolio, the old professor gingerly withdraws five glass plates. "Photographs?" you ask.

Collingsworth bobs his head. "Of a sort. Pugachev called them `irradiographs.' They use a type of light which has penetration factors, so that the Russian scientist was able to photograph and map portions of Africa from great altitude." He sighs. "Poor soul."

"Pugachev?"

"Indeed. Never returned from his last voyage. His secret of irradiography has likewise been lost." From among the five plates, Collingsworth selects one and mounts it on a viewing frame over the porthole. "What do you see here, eh?"

The plate shows a scattering of what seem to be buildings, including several of monumental proportions, forming a small community. You see no evident sign of life, but no hint that the settlement has been abandoned, either. "A lost city of the Africans?" you venture.

"Bah!" Collingsworth replaces the plates within the portfolio. "Pugachev's irradiographic camera worked better than even he had expected. Those structures are of the bottom, in the depths of this African lake—and that's where you're going in the bathysphere!" Make a note—you have the password IRRADIANCE. Turn to 73.

94. Note:

- If you have the password SHROUD, turn to 52.
- If you have the password AQUEOUS, turn to 78.
- If you have the password DISASTROUS, turn to 70.
- If you have the password STYGIAN or DIRE, turn to 40.
- If you have the password STRONGHEART, turn to 1.
- If you have more than one of these passwords, follow the directions for the first one you have on the list.
- If you have none of the above, turn to 97.

95. You step to the steel hatchway and rap against the steel plates with your knuckles. DUM-DUM-DE-DUM-DUM. The outside knocking stops, then replies: DUM-DUM-DE-DUM-DUM-DUM.

- If you want to open the hatch now, turn to 71.
- If you want to look out the porthole, turn to 109.
- If you want to do none of these, turn to 58.

96. "I have told you." snaps the Aquaceph. "SubAfrica. There! I've said it again. Slumbering beneath the waters of shelter, on the second world, secure from depredation and invasion." Turn to 108.

97. The bathysphere bounces as something collides against it, quivering and jouncing at the end of its steel tether. The motion—in all three dimensions—threatens to throw you head-first against protruding valves and the jutting steel structural girders. Try an Agility roll. The task difficulty level is 8 (Moderate)—unless you've been caught totally by surprise, in which case the difficulty is 12 (Difficult). You can only be caught "totally by surprise" the first time you come to this entry.

- If you succeed, turn to 66.
- If you fail, you are thrown—turn to 4.

98. "Excellent! Run from me! Try to escape! Illusion, I shall not tire of this game." The Aquaceph chases you about the room, scattering the dinnerware in the pursuit. Try an Agility roll to avoid being caught.

- If you succeed, turn to 42.
- If you fail, turn to 24.

99. You discover yourself face to face with a stranger. She is tall and slender, dressed in a most outlandish fashion, with a turban tied about her hair, a brief tunic that leaves her legs bare, and a queer cloak that wraps about her shoulders and attaches to the backs of her slippers. Everything seems to be made of some sort of kid leather, white and supple. A jeweled badge hangs from a bracelet, and a large crystal pendant is suspended from her left ear.

The most impressive things about her, besides her comely build and the copper-red hue of her skin, are her eyes. They seem to absorb you in a glance, drinking you in and pouring you out again, laughing at you and dissecting you and romancing you all at once. "Welcome to SubAfrica," she says, in flawless English. Her voice is low, and she speaks slowly, releasing the words one by one likes notes in a melody. "I am Mnoth. I am an Aquaceph." Turn to 37.

100. The lake is plunged into darkness now that the bright oxygen-arc lamp has been extinguished. Just to be safe, you switch off the dim electric lights within the bathysphere as well. Make a note—you have the password STYGIAN. Turn to 97.

101. "Your opinion is of no matter if I will it to be so," says the Aquaceph. "And I will it. Now argue with me no more." Turn to 53.

102. It's dark as Stygia outside—the creature has carried away or broken the oxygen-arc lamp! The inside of the bathysphere is lit only by dim electric lights. Make a note—you have the passwords STUPEFIED and STYGIAN. Turn to 94.

103. He motions you closer and leans to whisper conspiratorily. "Collingsworth tells me that he's taken you into his confidence. Let me add only this—if there are secrets on the African lake bottom, or elsewhere on the continent for that matter, the nation which possesses them will have the key to the future. This is no idle matter." Turn to 22.

104. Try a quick roll against your Agility level to escape the mysterious menace.

- If you succeed, turn to 30.
- If you fail, turn to 46.

105. Try a quick roll against your Strength level to free the Aquaceph from the entrapping stones.

- If you succeed, turn to 13. Otherwise, check off one of the boxes below and roll 1D6.
- If the number rolled is greater than the number of marked-out boxes, then turn to 25.
- If not, you may try another Strength roll, or you may abandon Mnoth and escape (turn to 27).

☐☐☐☐☐☐

106. "What purpose would it serve, except to betray my people to the Devourers That Wait? Is this your purpose, outlander? Do you offer destruction, risk,o and ultimate failure?" Mnoth's face flushes with anger. "Feel this, then!" The Aquaceph claps, and an invisible forces draw you downward. "Kneel to me, invasive one!"

- If you resist, turn to 69.
- If you obediently give in, turn to 43.

107. Something catches your eye. Looking around, you spot a strange-looking, multilimbed shadow on the wall behind you—a deep, dense darkness that pulses slowly. Following your glance, the Aquaceph sights the peculiarity. "The Devourer!" shouts Mnoth, leaping up. "You must flee!" But even as your host speaks, the shadows leaps toward you. Try an Agility roll to avoid the hurtling menace. The difficulty level is 8 (Moderate) plus 2 for every box checked off at entry 53 (when you turn there, be sure not to lose your place here). However, the adjusted difficulty level cannot be higher than 20.

- If you succeed, turn to 30.
- If you fail, turn to 46.

108. Roll 1D6. Count down the number of unmarked boxes equal to the number just rolled, cross out that box, and follow the directions which follow.

☐ Turn to 91.
☐ Turn to 67.
☐ Turn to 55.
☐ Turn to 26.
☐ Turn to 35.
☐ Turn to 59.
☐ Turn to 59.
☐ Turn to 59.
☐ Turn to 59.
☐ Turn to 59.
☐ Turn to 59.

109. The diving sphere has most improbably come to rest in the center of a square plaza. High above is a dome of shifting hue, an aurora borealis of the African depths. You instantly realize that you're not underwater anymore—there is air out there. But at what pressure?

- If you have the password ENLIGHTENED, turn to 10. Otherwise, you may:
- Open the hatch (turn to 71).
- Respond by tapping back (turn to 95).
- Do nothing (turn to 58).

110. To your horror, you see that a hairline crack now worms its way across the center of the pane of the viewing port. That thickness of glass is the weakest point in the structure of the bathysphere. Should it give way—and the crack makes this an eventual certainty—all the force of tons of lake will force its way into this diving sphere, imploding it like an egg smashed between clenched hands. Make a note—you have the password AQUEOUS. Turn to 94.

111. The grand salon is off-limits except for the most important of the *Destiny's* crew, but on Sunday evening the captain hosts a seminar here, at which one of the ship's more famous passengers lectures. You've had the pleasure of listening to such notables as Thomas Huxley, the science popularist (and the only Englishman on board), professors Edmond Whistler and

Thomas Engfeldt (both of Yale and respectively experts on ether theory and historical geography) and Mark Twain (the American humorist). Turn to 21.

112.* At last, you notice that there is more light within the diving chamber—the lake outside grows less dark! The craft is surfacing of itself, despite its apparent loss of motive power. Then a bell chimes, and with an explosive hiss the uppermost portion of the room irises open, admitting an African breeze. Meanwhile, water floods in from somewhere, washing about your ankles. It is a simple matter to clamber upward onto the superstructure of the bobbing sphere. Spying the *Destiny of Man* not too far distant, you make an impromptu flag from your clothes and wave to catch the attention of your countrymen. Shortly, you see the paddle-wheeler come about, and a dinghy is sent to fetch you. Congratulations—your adventure is over.

APPENDIX

Loose Ends: If Mnoth survives this adventure, the Aquaceph may continue in the campaign as either a PC or an NPC. Mnoth lost much memory when the Activator was destroyed, but might recall something interesting about the lost civilization by accident. If used as an NPC, the Aquaceph becomes emotionally dependent on the PC. Meanwhile, there are plenty of villains in the solar system who would like to get their hands on Mnoth, fearing that the Americans will unlock the secrets of the SubAfricans. The alien diving sphere floods quickly and descends again to the lake bottom, falling into the chasm. SubAfrica is flooded and entirely in ruin, and future explorations will be extremely hazardous. The Guardian—the captive beast which originally attacked the bathysphere—now roams the deeps at large and may eventually cause grief to the Dest*iny of Man*

Character Points: This adventure is worth one character point, with the following bonuses and penalties: Characters with the password SAVIOR receive one renown point (Exploratory Discovery) and an additional character point. Characters with the password PERILOUS should roll 1D6. On a result of 4-6, another renown point (Scientific Achievement) is received. Characters who have multiple copies of this password may roll for each, but only a single renown point can be won. Characters with the password VALIANT should also roll 1D6. On a result of 4-6, another renown point (Exploratory Discovery) is received.

None of the battles in this adventure qualify the PC for a Close Combat experience point.

Password Guide: The following is a guide to passwords encountered during this adventure.

ALTAR=ACTIVATOR: Final battle takes place in Activator cavern.

IRRADIANCE=ADVANCE NOTICE: You know about Pugachev.

CONFOUNDED=BROKEN CAMERA: You have no camera.

STUPEFIED=BROKEN LAMP: The oxygen-arc lamp is broken.

ENLIGHTENED=CITY VIEW: You have seen SubAfrica from the bathysphere.

BROWSER=CONNECTICUT: You carry Twain's novel with you.

AQUEOUS=CRACK: The viewing port is cracked.

STYGIAN=DARK: The oxygen-arc lamp is turned off.

VALIANT=DEPTHS: You have a picture of SubAfrica.

SECLORUM=EMBLEM: You have the great seal of the United States.

SAVIOR=FREED: You free Mnoth from the fallen rocks.

SHROUD=GAS: Battery gas has flooded the compartment.

DISASTROUS=LEAK: The bathysphere has sprung a leak.

STRONGHEART=OBSERVER: You are watching for the creature.

PERILOUS=PICTURE: You try to take a picture of the Guardian.

MORTIFY=RETREAD: The Guardian attacks again.

DIRE=SNAP: The bathysphere cable has snapped. Ω

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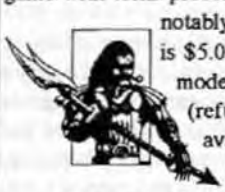
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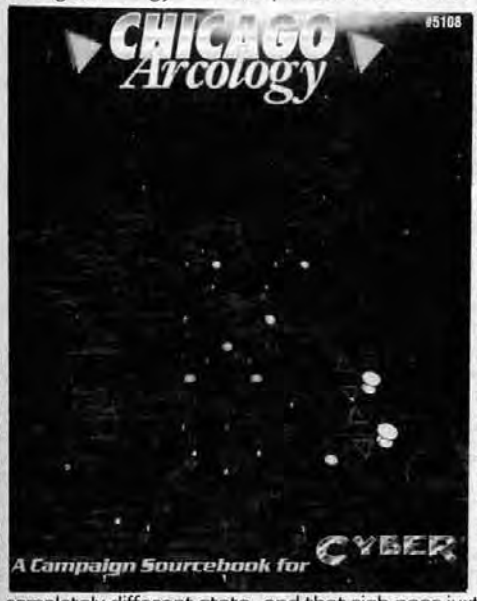
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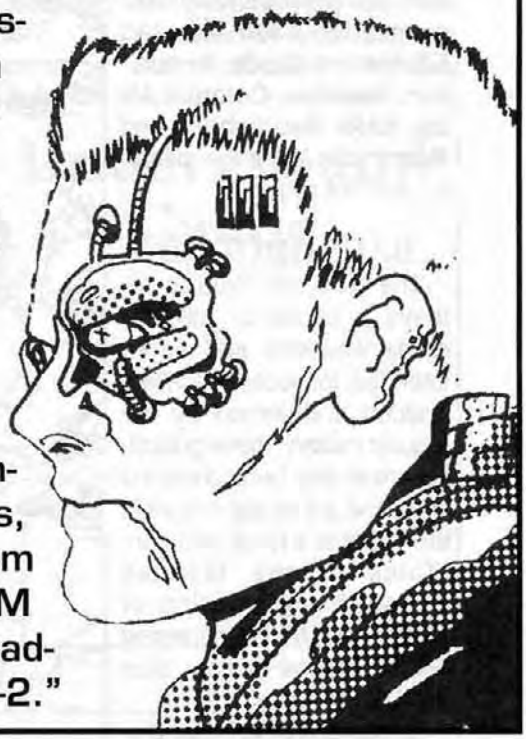
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Cache and Carry

A 2300 AD adventure on Beta Canum

By Andy Slack

This is an introductory-level adventure for a beginning group of **2300 AD** player characters. The scenario takes place on the French continent of Beta Canum. The time period has been left deliberately vague—the referee can set it before, during or after the Kafer invasion. The referee should have a copy of **2300 AD** and **Equipment Guide**. In addition, **Invasion, Colonial Atlas, Kafer Sourcebook** and **Beanstalk** might be useful but are not required.

BACKGROUND

The PCs are hired to retrieve a cache of military-grade weapons and armor intended for local guerrillas. Trained and armed by the regular military, these guerrillas are to stay behind enemy lines and act as saboteurs in the event of a local invasion. (Think of the German Werewolf organization of 1945, or the NATO-sponsored Gladio groups in Italy after World War II.)

Depending on your particular campaign, the patron may claim to be a smuggler or a member of the original stay-behind guerilla group, or he may want to sell the weapons on the black market. See the NPCs section for more details.

APPROACH

The cache is hidden in a hilly area near a small town, about two kilometers from any inhabited buildings. The patron says he knows roughly where the cache is located and will guide the PCs to it under cover of darkness. He will claim not to remember exactly where the cache is and to have lost the key he needs to get in—the PCs will have to help him in both tasks.



MAP DESCRIPTION

The map is the underground command bunker from **Merc: 2000** (page 72), with some minor changes.

Entrances: Two concealed trapdoors lead down into the cache. Beneath the trapdoor is a flight of stairs leading down into the hillside—and the cache.

Bunk Room: Here are primitive, communal living quarters for a squad (10 people), including bunks and storage space for personal gear.

Storeroom: This room is full of assorted noncombat equipment, including a satellite uplink communicator, maps, compasses or other locating gear, and camouflage clothing.

Restroom: Simple sanitary facilities for the guerilla squad, including a chemical toilet.

Kitchen: Stores of long-life, prepackaged food (e.g., MREs) and basic facilities for cooking. Cooking facilities are patterned on the "Ho Chi Minh" ovens which disperse smoke and smell over a wide area so that the hideout is hard to locate.

The kitchen area and its contents may be treasure in themselves during the Kafer invasion.

Armory: Here are the goodies the PCs came for. There are weapons to equip an infantry

squad, plus as much ammunition as the referee is prepared to let them have.

The weapons cache includes six FAM-90s, one FTE-10, one Quin-Darlan M2-A2 plasmagun, one Blindicide-9 launcher, one Martel launcher and several pistols (M-57 or 9-23 Enforcer equivalent).

As the expected users are guerillas rather than front-line troops, armor is limited to nonrigid or inertial suits, or vests and helmets.

Communications Room: This area contains equipment for monitoring civilian and enemy channels, plus encoding and decoding gear.

The code discs are fairly valuable to certain people (e.g., terrorists) and can be sold on the black market. If the PCs think of this opportunity, see **Challenge 44** for rules on black market sales.

Office: This room contains a desk and chair, maps of the region, and portacomp chips with files of suitable targets, contact names, etc.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

PCs succeeding at a Difficult Recon task can discover one of the two concealed trapdoors leading into the cache.

Task: To find the entrance to the underground cache: Difficult. Recon. 1 minute.

The fact that the patron cannot take them straight to the door once they find the cache area may make the PCs start to get suspicious, if they aren't already. The entrance is protected by a mechanical lock (which requires no power to operate). Opening it is another task.

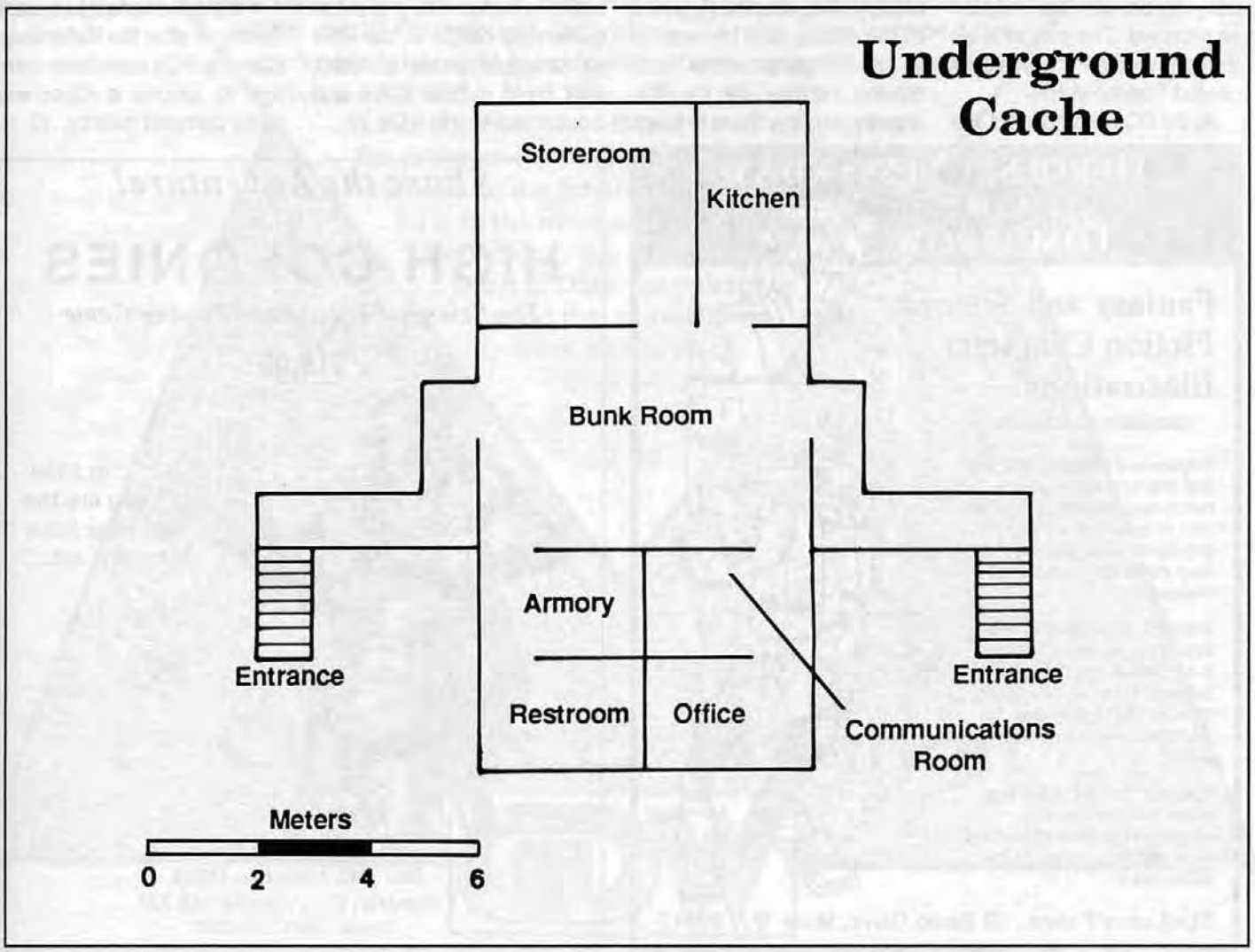
Task: To open the mechanical lock protecting the entrance: Difficult. Security Systems. 2 minutes.

A pressure sensor at the bottom of the stairs triggers a trap if anyone steps on it. The trap is a security gas system, rigged to flood the stairway with doze gas while simultaneously setting off an alarm at the nearest military base. (See the **Equipment Guide** for more details of these security items). To bypass the trap, the PCs must leap over the relevant area of floor. Detecting the trap is a task.

Task: To detect the security gas system trap at the bottom of the stairs: Routine. Security Systems. 1 minute.

Referee: If the scenario is set during the Kafer war, the alarm has been disabled but the gas system has not.

All encoding/decoding and office files are stored on portacomp chips infected with a boot sector virus. The virus identifies the person using the portacomp by monitoring the pattern and speed of their keystrokes during login. These patterns are quite distinctive to begin with, and the intended users of the system are also trained to use a specific pattern. If the chips are accessed by anyone except the intended users, even just



to list a directory of what is on them, the virus will erase everything on the chip and the portacomp.

A PC with Computer-2 and a portacomp can be assumed to have the proper software to detect and deal with viruses. Detecting and removing the virus are both tasks.

Task: To detect the presence of the virus: Simple. Computer. 1 minute.

Task: To render the virus harmless: Routine. Computer. 1 minute.

NPCS

The key NPC in this adventure is the patron. He is armed and alert to the possibility of betrayal by the PCs. He will do whatever is necessary to defend himself, but would rather threaten the PCs into carrying on with the mission as planned. The patron is an Experienced NPC with a concealed Traylor M-57.

As the PCs may suspect, the story the patron told them may not be entirely true. There are several possible reasons why he is staging this mission.

Terrorist: By capturing and torturing a member of the stay-behind guerrilla group, the patron learned of the cache's whereabouts. Depending on how they react to his offer and perform the job, he may shoot them, double-cross them and make off with the guns, or ask them to join his terrorist group. Either way, remember that he can implicate them in a serious crime (stealing the cache) and so has something to blackmail them with. On the other hand, if they play their cards right, the PCs can turn him in for a sizeable reward and a renown point, and still keep the guns for themselves. ("No officer, we don't know where he put them.")

Criminal: By blackmail and bribery, the patron has learned of the cache, and he intends to sell the guns on the black market. He may offer the PCs money or allow them to keep a share of the weapons.

Stay-Behind: The area has already been invaded, and the Kafers managed to wipe out most of the stay-behind guerrilla group. Only the patron remains, and he plans to recruit the PCs to replace the group's casualties.

In this case (only) the patron knows the cache's exact location and the details of the trap and portacomp virus, but he will not reveal this information unless the PCs fail to find them—he wants to test their skills.

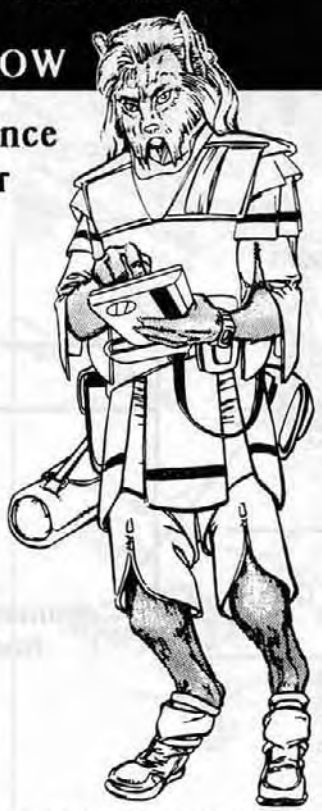
ALTERNATIVES

If the group seems to be having too easy a time, introduce one of the following complications, adjusting numbers to suit your PCs' capabilities.

- Another band of rogues has also learned of the cache and through pure bad luck has chosen the same night to make a move. They are Experienced NPCs in the thief or smuggler/pirate careers, and have similar skills and equipment to the PCs.
- A fully armed squad of soldiers show up, either to inspect and replenish the hideout under cover of darkness (before or after the Kafer invasion) or to seek shelter there (during the invasion). These will be elite troops (e.g., SAS or special forces) who have worked with the stay-behinds or might have to do so in future. They are Elite NPCs in the ground military career, and probably have better combat skills and equipment than the PCs do.
- The stay-behind group chooses the same night to stage an exercise or occupy the hideout. The guerrillas' combat skills are equal to or better than the PCs', but their weapons are inside the hideout, so they have only knives and (possibly) an odd pistol. They are Experienced NPCs in the colonist career.
- If the scenario takes place during or after the Kafer invasion, the PCs somehow manage to arouse a Kafer war party camped nearby. Ω

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CULT of DECEPTION

By Jane M. Lindskold

This adventure was designed for novice or beginning characters, and assumes that the PCs have no real proof that there are things inhuman lurking beyond human kin. This does not preclude parapsychologist investigators or characters with training in the occult—knowledge is not the same thing as experience. The adventure uses the 1890s *Gaslight* setting but can easily be adapted to either the 1920s or 1990s.

INVESTIGATION

Sir Reginald Rhys approaches the PCs. He explains that his wife, Lady Elizabeth, has become involved with spiritualism since their eldest son, Robert, died in a boating accident about a year before. Lately, she has become particularly fascinated with Amito Ptah Osiris, who claims to contact Robert at the seances Lady Elizabeth now regularly attends.

Lord Rhys wishes to hire the PCs to learn everything they can about Osiris and then prove to Lady Elizabeth that he is a fraud. He can offer £10 per PCs and reasonable expenses—half in advance, half on success. The PCs will have freedom to search his house and question the servants. However, he does not wish Lady Elizabeth to know what he has hired the PCs for.

The Rhys household is located in Paddington, London. Members of the household include Rhys, Lady Elizabeth, Bert Allen (groundskeeper), Baxter Fairbanks (butler), Mrs. Fairbanks (cook) and Molly Fairbanks (16-year-old maid). Other Fairbanks children are employed elsewhere.

MOUSE MAN

It may occur to the PCs to interview street urchins to learn rumors/information about the Osiris household. With suitable bribes, the urchins can be convinced to tell about their contact with the Osiris estate. The urchins will report two things: They see an unusual number of snakes near the Osiris spiritualist, sort of Yeats without Yeats' brains or talent (age 61)

The PCs may wish to arrive early at the seance and investigate the room. With a careful search and successful Spot Hidden rolls, they may make a number of interesting discoveries in the guest parlor where seances are regularly held.

- A simple wind whistle is set in



the chimney and will wail and moan with wind and temperature changes. A Spot Hidden will reveal the marks in the soot where it is wedged into place.

- A slot has been enlarged in the floorboards between the parlor and the sitting room above. Another cut has been made in the patterned rug.
- On the parlor table, the legs nearest to the end where Osiris sits have been loosened so that when a wedge is removed, the formerly solid table will shake madly.
- Osiris burns various drugs in incense censors before a seance (hashish, opium, etc.), followed by some innocent scent (jasmine, sandalwood, etc.) The fumes leaves a trace that makes some participants very suggestible (make a resistance roll against a Poison strength of 7)

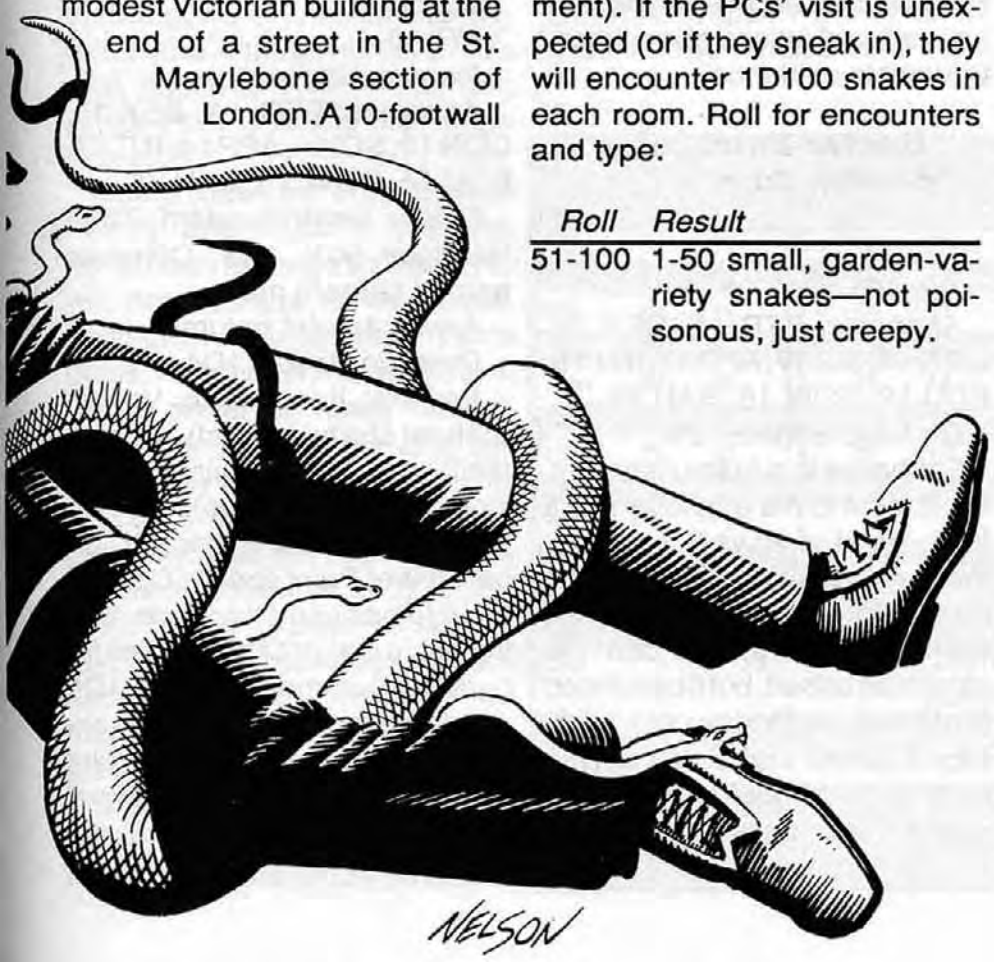
OSIRIS' LAIR

The PCs may wish to visit Osiris' home. The house is a modest Victorian building at the end of a street in the St. Marylebone section of London. A 10-foot wall with front and back iron lattice-work gates (always closed and locked) surrounds the house. Near the kitchen chimney is a trap door onto the roof from the attic. All ground floor windows can be shuttered and locked. When the windows are locked, the resistance is 20; the locks are deadbolts and cannot be picked from the outside. The door has a resistance of 25 and can be picked with a successful Mechanical Repair roll.

Use the Brockford house on page 86 of the *Call of Cthulhu* rules for the specific floor plan. All the rooms are decorated according to common Victorian convention—lots of ruffles around tables and chairs, many knick-knacks, leather-bound books on shelves, etc.

If the PCs' visit is expected, the only snakes they will encounter are Strike (who will go to room 3 in the upper story), plus 1D10 other snakes throughout the house (the rest are in the basement). If the PCs' visit is unexpected (or if they sneak in), they will encounter 1D100 snakes in each room. Roll for encounters and type:

Roll	*Result*
51-100	1-50 small, garden-variety snakes—not poisonous, just creepy.
21-50	1D6 large constrictors. Damage: 1D6+2. Negates armor after first round.
1-20	1D6 venomous snakes (rattlers, cobras, etc.). Damage: 1. Poison: 13. A near save indicates that the venom only partially got into the victim's system, causing sickness, not death.



The PCs may notice something strange about those present at Osiris' house (Spot Hidden roll minus 25%). They are actually serpent people, cloaking their true appearance with illusion. For more information, see Serpent People below.

Study: This is where Osiris holds his seances. During a seance, the lights are either extinguished or angled and dimmed, so it will take a Spot Hidden roll minus 25% to see any of the concealed doors, mirrors, etc. If the study is investigated secretly, a normal Spot Hidden will reveal an array of hidden mirrors, draft vents, hidden bells and chimes, hidden incense censors, etc.

Osiris' Chamber: A copy of Osiris' spell book is hidden under a floor board beneath his bed, along with £50 and some expensive-looking jewelry. There are two asps in the compartment.

Basement: This area has many snakes in it, along with a coal-burning furnace. The secret door to the chapel is well-hidden (Spot Hidden roll minus 10%).

Chapel: This is where sacrifices to Yig are made. The small

room contains an altar carved in the shape of a slithering serpent, and the walls are painted with scenes of serpent people cavorting in fantastic landscapes. The room contains sconces for torches (no gaslight here). Behind the head of the altar is a slightly raised stone (a Spot Hidden roll will reveal it). If this stone is pressed, a secret compartment is revealed, containing a duplicate of Osiris' spell book. The spine of the book is hollow and contains an asp which will wriggle out and bite whoever is holding the book.

Sir Reginald Rhys

Profession: Gentleman/government.
Age: 67.
Sex: M.
HP: 9.
Income: £1000 per annum.
Attributes: STR 6, DEX 10, CON 4, SIZ 14, APP 16, INT 14, EDU 14, POW 14, SAN 70.

Rhys receives a small basic income from lands that he does not administer, living instead in London and drawing additional income from a government post. He is dependant on his wife's income to maintain his life-style and appearances. His real objection to his wife's involvement with Osiris stems not with the spiritualism but with her financial involvement.

Lady Elizabeth Rhys

Profession: Gentlewoman.
Age: 61.
Sex: F.
HP: 9.
Income: £200 per year.
Attributes: STR 5, DEX 12, CON 8, SIZ 10, APP 17, INT 14, EDU 10, POW 12 ,SAN 60.

Lady Elizabeth is the mother of two grown children (several others died in infancy). Thomas, age 35, is serving with the military in India. Martha, age 25, is married and lives with her husband and two small children in Nottingham.

When Robert, the eldest son, died from pneumonia after a boating accident, she was distraught. A well-meaning friend introduced her to spiritualism, and she now finds great comfort in her two or three weekly sessions. She is rapidly becoming Osiris' primary patron—her donations to him are steadily increasing, and she regularly hosts one of the weekly seances in her parlor.

Prior to this time, she was comfortable with having her husband administer her money (a moderate income from her father's estate). But she now has a use for it and doesn't quite understand Rhys' needs (he always acted as if his money alone supported them and hers was just for extras).

She desperately wants to believe in Osiris and will not believe he is a fraud unless given incontrovertible evidence.

Baxter Fairbanks

Profession: Butler.
Age: 47.
Sex: M.
HP: 16.
Attributes: STR 15, DEX 14, CON 14, SIZ 17, APP 17, INT 15, EDU 12, POW 15, SAN 75.
Damage Bonus: 1D4

Fairbanks is a faithful servant. He is loyal to his employers to a fault—fond of Rhys but sympathetic with Lady Elizabeth to the point of ignoring orders to talk to the investigators if he can. He cannot be bribed, but if convinced (Fast Talk or Oratory at –10%) he will reveal that Osiris arrives early to "meditate" before each seance and stays alone in the parlor except for occasional visits from Bert Allen.

Bert Allen

Profession: Groundskeeper.
Age: 27.
Sex: M.
HP: 17.
Attributes: STR 17, DEX 15, CON 16, SIZ 17, APP 10, INT 14, EDU 7, POW 9, SAN 45.
Damage Bonus: 1D6

Allen's duties include any heavy work around the manor. He has been paid by Osiris to help put in some of the "engines" used for special effects. He will be afraid for his job if he confesses, but can be bribed if the PCs guarantee that they will not reveal his role.

Allen is a gambler and goes through his wages by playing the ponies on a regular basis.

Amito Ptah Osiris (Aldis Adderton)

Profession: Seer.
Age: 42.
Sex: M.
HP: 13.
Income: Unavailable.
Attributes: STR 14, DEX 15, CON 12, SIZ 14, APP 14, INT 17, EDU 15, POW 15, SAN 75.
Skills: Ventriloquism 75%, Handgun 50% 1D8. Other as normal serpent man.
Armor: 1 point natural.
Damage Bonus: 1D4.
Powers: Immune to Venom (natural ability, no cost)., Illusion (self) (one Power Point per illusion, no maintenance).
Spells: Control Serpent (1D6 per Power Point spent), Contact Yig (He has used this once. See the basic *Call of Cthulhu* rules for details.), Summon Serpent (1D6 nonpoisonous or 1D3 poisonous snakes per Power Point spent. They will come by natural means; this is summoning, not

conjuration.), Hypnosis (1 Power Point, 1 Spell Point. On the Resistance Table, set the average of the caster's Pow/IQ as the active characteristic against the average of the subject's Pow/IQ. If the caster succeeds, control can then be maintained as long as the trance is maintained. The trance can be broken by sudden physical or mental shock or by the caster.). Spells in Ptah Osiris' Spell Book are written in Latin substitution code. (Read Latin needed for any chance at decoding.)

Osiris is a "degenerate" serpent man who appears nearly human even without illusion magic. He uses the serpent man illusion spell to make himself appear more attractive and to smooth his skin color and eyes. Because of his nearly human appearance, he was educated in good schools and has travelled in Egypt and India. During his travels he began to study the occult with the deliberate intent of using his knowledge to defraud and control humans. His real name is Aldis Adderton; Amito Ptah Osiris is his "stage name."

Osiris desires control and money, and wants to keep his nonhuman heritage a secret. He will not hesitate to lie, cheat, steal or murder to obtain these goals. However, he is subtle and would prefer to make himself socially indispensable and secure. Lady Elizabeth is useful to him as a social gateway. If he gets wind that his seance tricks will be exposed to Lady Elizabeth, he will expose himself to her, using his Hypnotize ability if necessary to convince her he meant well. He will then use promises of a "meeting" with Robert in the flesh to lure her back into faith in him (the meeting will be achieved by means of a serpent man taking on Robert's form).

Strike: Strike is his familiar, given by Yig. Strike is a gigantic diamond back rattler, 16 feet long, and will never appear in public. *HP:* 10 A*rmor:* 1 Bite 50%, 1D8 Poison Str: 15.

Serpent People

Six to 12 young adult serpent people will be present at Osiris' house, posing as servants, students and guests. These are all young students taking training form Osiris. They all have Immunity to Venom and Illusion (Self). If more than six are present, each of the additional ones has a 20% chance of being a spell caster. Three-quarters of these will have no more than Control Serpent. The additional one-quarter will have Summon Serpent (nonpoisonous).

If a Serpent Person is pressed, he may drop the illusion of humanity in hopes that the nonhuman attributes of his appearance will frighten the attacker. (Roll 1D100 to see how nonhuman the creature appears. A high roll indicates more nonhuman characteristics). Dropping the illusion can be done the same round as an attack, but reestablishing the illusion takes a round of concentration.

Despite their natural illusion ability, the serpent people can be detected as nonhuman. They are cooler-blooded than human average, they grow sluggish when it is cold, and they are often hard of hearing.

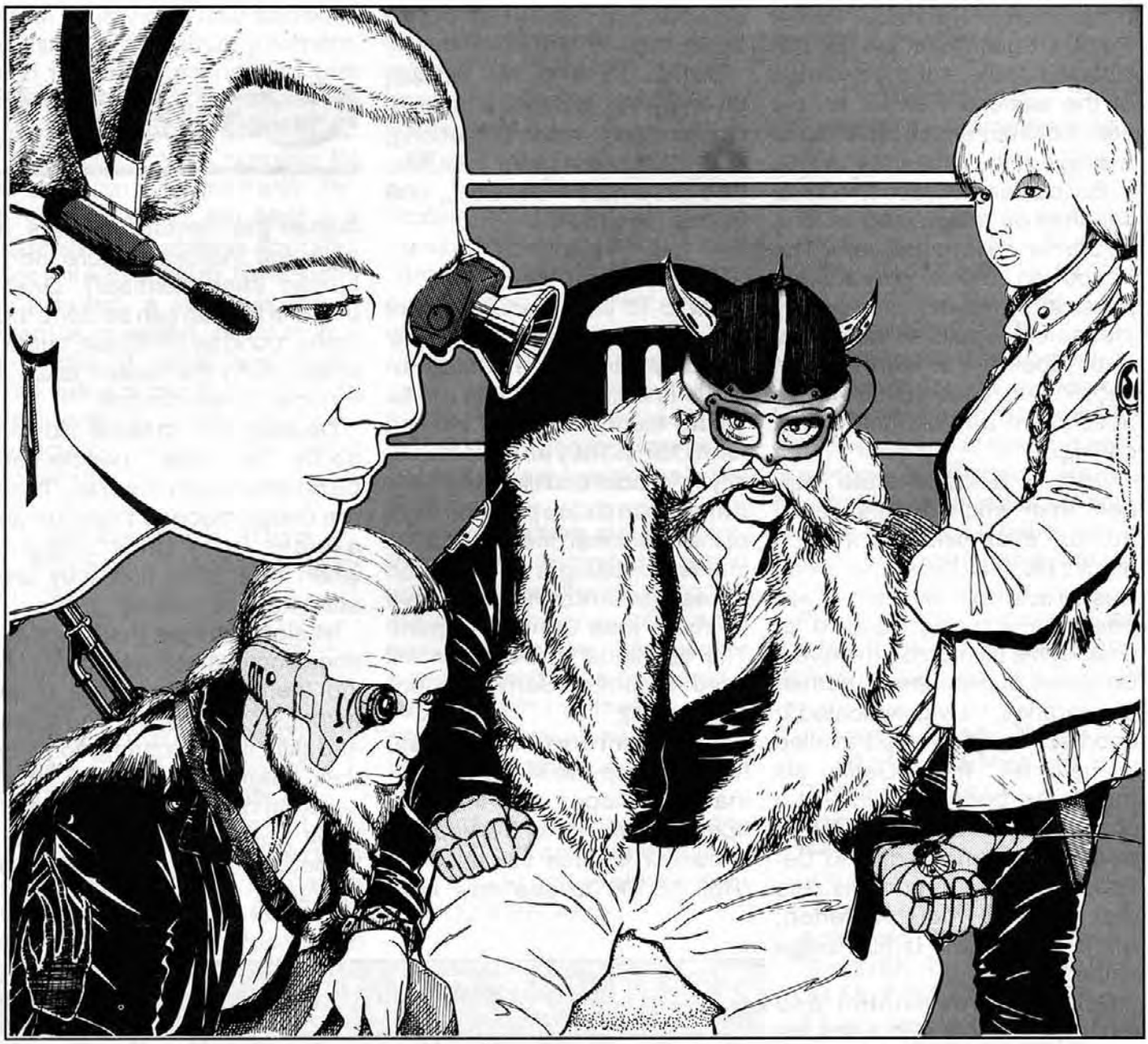
Illusion changes their appearance somewhat, seemingly giving them hair (they are often hairless), and tinting the eyes and skin. Illusion cannot conceal their natural musky odor, thinness, and rounded shoulders. Their walk is particularly loose-limbed, reflecting an altered hip structure.

Sample Serpent People

No.:	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
Str	10	11	12	10	14	13	11	17	10	11	12	16
Con	11	12	10	14	13	11	17	10	11	12	16	10
Siz	13	11	17	10	11	12	16	17	18	16	17	16
Int	16	17	18	16	17	18	16	17	18	16	17	16
Pow	13	13	13	13	14	14	14	13	14	15	12	13
Dex	13	14	15	13	14	15	12	13	14	15	12	13
HP	11	12	14	12	12	12	17	10	11	12	14	12
DamB	0	0	D4	0	D4	D4	D4	D4	0	0	0	D4
Armor	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

San Loss: Save or 1D6 for a serpent person in natural form.

Weapon	Attack %	Damage
Bite	35	1D8+Poison. Potency is equal to the serpent person's Con.
Kick	35	1D6+Damage bonus.
Hatchet	35	1D6+1+Damage bonus.
Small club	35	1D6+Damage bonus. Ω



Live Eye

By Michael LaBossiere



After months of interviewing people who own cute pets, filming children feeding squirrels in the park and fetching coffee, you finally have a real field assignment: an interview with a gang leader. You're so excited that the remark of the smart guy in the next cubicle doesn't bother you any more—"They're just sending you because this guy is a psycho, and if he kills you and eats you for dinner, it won't be a great loss to the station." What does he know? After all, they just sent him to interview a man who owns a pit bull that says "I hate you." But they're sending you to interview Bjorn Iron Claw, leader af the Blood Claws!

Running a media campaign or a campaign with media emphasis can be difficult. Perhaps the most serious problem is trying to make the campaign exciting but maintain the flavor of media involvement—wherein the players are often reduced to mere recorders of the actions of the heroes, villains and victims. While no magic formula will guarantee a proper balance, the following introductory miniadventure is an example of how to effectively integrate the media into your campaign.

"Live Eye" is set in the "bad part" of a city. The player characters are members of a media team. The party will be given a car or a van large enough to carry them all (no sense in risking an expensive AV-4 on this assignment). They will also be equipped with camera equipment (minicam, lights and so forth) and armored T-shirt vests (SP10). Naturally, they can bring any other equipment they own.

The station will recommend that at least one solo accompany the camerajock and interviewer, but it will not provide one (unless a player character solo is available). You will be given $400 in small bills, which must be returned if not spent.

BRIEFING

The Blood Claws are a boostergang (a gang in which members have as a primary focus the acquisition of cybertechnology). Their distinguishing characteristic is that every member of the gang is equipped with rippers (extendable blades mounted in the person's hands). The Blood Claws are often covertly hired for corporate warfare and are paid in cybertechnology. They are believed to be primarily employed as expendable muscle in certain operations.

The leader, Melvin J. Ottermeyer (a.k.a. Bjorn Iron Claw), is a former US Army technician. After severe injuries to his head and arms, he was transferred back to the States from Central America. After receiving cybernetic arms, he took up a life of crime (17 assaults and 15 armed robberies in two months). He was eventually captured, but after serving three months of his 75 years, he escaped and formed the Blood Claws.

The Blood Claws are the bitter enemies of a rival boostergang, the Iron Fists. Little is known regarding the Iron Fists except that they are a new boostergang and that the members all have BigKnucks (implanted, reinforced artificial knuckles) and some martial arts training.

You are to interview Bjorn Iron Claw of the Blood Claws at 12:30 a.m. at the Blooded Blade (275 east 27th Street). You should acquire the following information:

- The corporations the Blood Claws have worked for.
- The details of their corporate missions.
- Any particularly interesting gang activities.
- Information of public interest.

GETTING STARTED

As the team drives from the "good side of town" to the "wrong side of the tracks," conditions will visibly worsen. The quality of the buildings will deteriorate, and the streets will be in worse repair, with more litter strewn about. Gang graffiti will be evident, along with various mean- and dangerous-looking people. Eventually, the team will end up in the heart of gang territory, a place without law or even hope.

The buildings are gaunt, decayed and dying. The streets are worn, littered and stripped—even burning vehicles can be seen. Shadowy figures, some with bright glints of chrome, drift like lost souls through the night.

The journey to the Blooded Blade will take 15 minutes once the team arrives in gang territory. Roll for encounters every five minutes.

Roll	*Result*
1-6	None
7	Thrown object
8	Gunshot
9	Car trouble
10	Attack

Thrown Object: A stone, bottle, brick or other object is hurled from the shadows or from a rooftop and hits the car. Damage is minor. If the PCs decide to leave the car and go after the perpetrators, refer to the attack encounter description.

Gunshot: A shot is aimed at the car, but the damage is not serious. If the PCs decide to pursue their attackers, refer to the attack encounter description.

Car Trouble: Something goes wrong with the engine. It will take 1D6×3 minutes to fix, minus one minute per level of basic tech skill (a minimum of one minute). Keep rolling for encounters.

Attack: A small gang of young street punks decides to roll the team (or the PCs



came after them after one of the other encounters). If the gang members attack, they will fire on the car from hiding and try to block the street with things like burning tires and garbage cans. Once the car is stopped, they will attack until they win, are driven off or are killed.

Gang Members

There is at least one gang member per PC and NPC present.

Int	4	Tech	2
Ref	7	Cool	5
Luck	2	Att	4
Emp	4	Body	5

Skills: Athletics+4, Melee Weapons+3, Brawling+2. At least half of them will have Pistol+2.

Equipment: Knives, pipes (clubs). At least half will have some sort of cheap pistol (usually a .38 with a UR rating).

Personality: Vicious, ruthless and stoned.

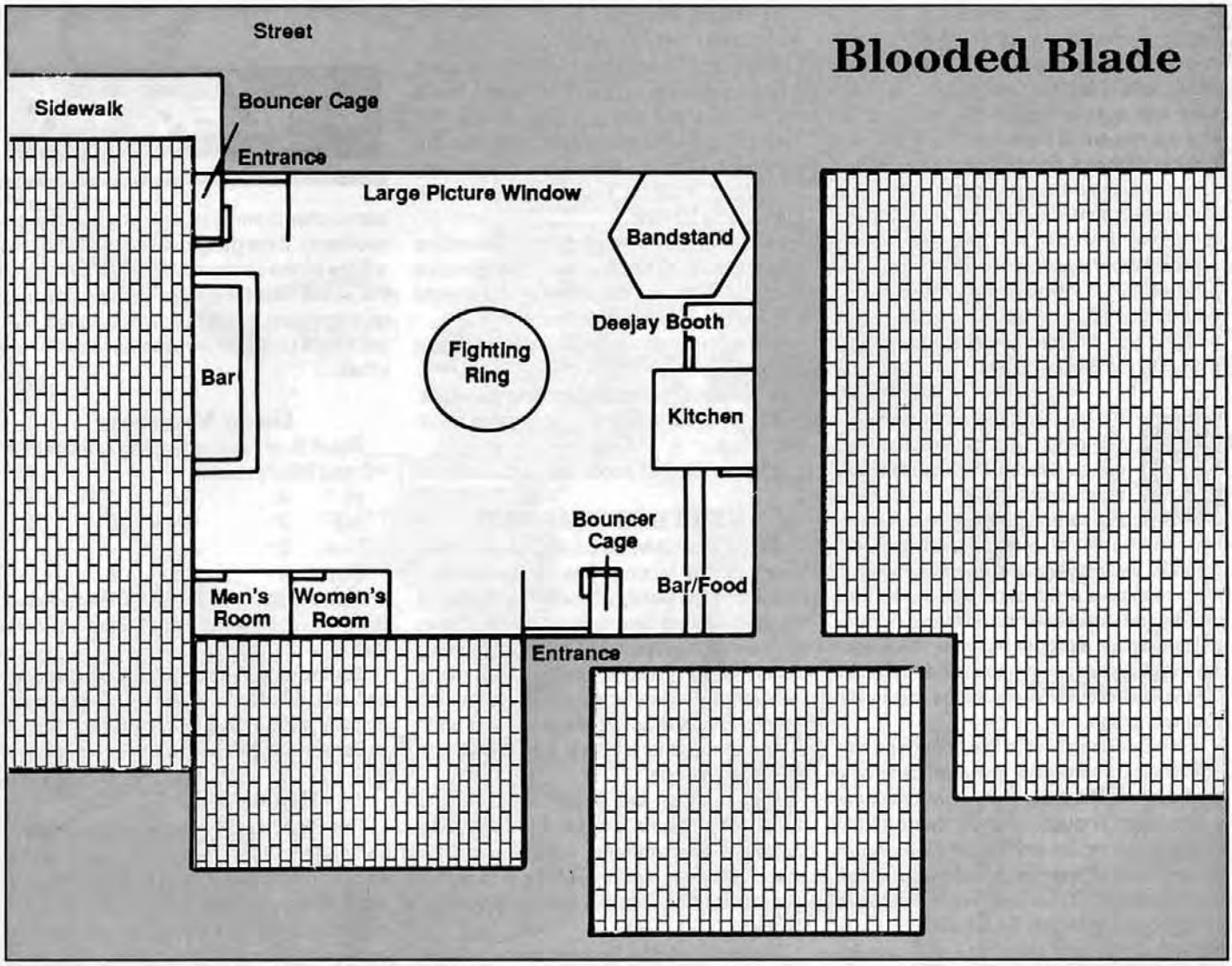
BLOODED BLADE

The Blooded Blade is a typical boostergang hangout. The street in front is littered with broken bottles, spent casings, and other "stuff." Parked directly in front of it are several chromed motorcycles, with fanciful beast-skulls on the front. Loud, "Chromed-Metal" music can be heard echoing in the street. Nasty-looking people go in and out of the bar, some fall into the street., and some don't get up. Through the large picture window, the cavortings of the worst of humanity can be seen.

After the PCs park their car, their hubcaps will mysteriously disappear and large quantities of graffiti will spontaneously appear on it.

Inside each entrance to the Blooded Blade is a bouncer cage. A large bouncer stationed in each cage ensures that each person coming in pays the $5 cover charge. They don't card, and they don't care about weapons. The bar serves a wide variety of vile concoctions, and the food bar serves both drinks and foods like wings and burgers. Service is basically "pay 'n' grab."

The bandstand "octagon" is surrounded with high-grade fencing. This keeps the customers from killing the bands they do not like. While it is okay to throw bottles at bad musicians, it is unsporting to shoot them (there have been exceptions). Of course, the music is quite loud. (To simulate the sound, find a small, enclosed area, and play a Metallica tape and a Megadeth tape at the same time. Add in some polka music, playing backward. Turn the volume setting up to



10.) When live music is unavailable (say, if the band is gunned down) tapes can be played at the deejay booth. There are giant speakers everywhere to ensure the proper noise levels.

In the center of the room is the fighting ring, a large wooden platform, notched and bloodstained. When a fight erupts, rather than throw fighters out, the bouncers toss them onto the platform, and bets are placed. People can also voluntarily fight, and there usually are some prize fights ($50-$200) every night.

Bjorn Iron Claw and his buddies will be near the fighting platform, watching the action and cheapshotting fighters who get close enough. After he watches a few matches, Bjorn will be willing to talk to the team. The PCs can use noise filters to interview him but will still have to shout. Bjorn will be quite talkative if the PCs buy him and his buddies a few buckets and some wings.

Sometime during the interview, oddly dressed men riding motorcycles will come crashing through the picture window, resulting in chaos and utter confusion. Bjorn yells "Iron Fists!" The Iron Fist gang members are intent on killing Bjorn and will do anything to get to him. Naturally, the PCs will want to get this all on film.

Bouncers

The two bouncers at the Blooded Blade keep the customers from doing permanent damage to the building. They don't care if the customers hurt each other. When the Iron Fists attack, they will try to intervene.

Int	3	Tech	2
Ref	7	Cool	6
Luck	4	Att	2
Emp	4	Body	9

Skills: Athletics+5, Melee Weapons+4, Pistol+3.

Hardware: Cyberaudio with radio splice. One bouncer has a slice 'n' dice, and one has rippers.

Equipment: Combat knife, .45 Colt automatic, Kevlar jacket (SP=18).

Bjorn Iron Claws

Bjorn is teetering on the edge of cyberpsychosis. He fancies himself to be a mighty Viking warrior, and he is eager to earn his way into Valhalla. Because of his mindset, he dresses in Viking-style clothing and has a helmet with chrome horns. He likes to tell tales and will recount his "adventures" to the team.

Int	7	Tech	6
Ref	6/8	Cool	9
Luck	6	Att	5
Emp	1	Body	8

Skills: Streetwise+4, Intimidate+6, Pistol+5, Rifle+5, Martial Arts+3, Brawling+6, Melee Weapons+6, Awareness+5, Athletics+6, Basic Tech:+4, Cybertech+3.

Hardware: Interface plugs, two cyberarms (both equipped with rippers—the right arm has a four-shot, 12-gauge shotgun, and the left has a 9mm Mini Uzi SMG), biomonitor, reflex booster (+2), radio splice and bug detector.

Equipment: Kevlar jacket (SP=18), smartchipped Whirlwind (see **Challenge 43**, page 58), AK-47, two clips.

Blood Claws

These gang members are fanatically loyal to Bjorn and will die for him.

Int	4	Tech	4
Ref	7/8	Cool	7
Luck	4	Att	3
Emp	2	Body	8

Skills: Intimidate+3, Streetwise+4, Pistol+4, Brawling+5, Awareness+4, Athletics+4, Melee Weapons+3.

Hardware: Interface plugs, rippers, cyberoptics with targeting and infrared, cyberaudio with radio splice, cut off chips (see **Challenge 43**), reflex booster.

Equipment: Kevlar jacket (SP=18), .357 Magnum, smartchipped AK-47, combat knife.

Iron Fists (12)

These men are vicious psychos. They are trying to kill Bjorn and everyone with him (this includes the PCs). Life (even their own) means nothing to them.

Int	4	Tech	4
Ref	7/8	Cool	7
Luck	4	Att	3
Emp	2	Body	8

Skills: Martial Arts+6, Athletics+4, Pistol+3, Rifle+4, Intimidate+4, Streetwise+3, Awareness+5.

Hardware: Reflex boosters, BigKnucks, two have cyberarms (right) equipped with 9mm Mini Uzis, cyberoptics with targeting scope and low-lite enhancement.

Equipment: Kevlar jacket (SP=18), smartchipped Uzis, combat knives, 9mm automatic, motorcycle.

FINISH

If the team gets a good interview, they will be rewarded and will be moved up on the assignment list. If the team gets good coverage of the ensuing battle, then they will receive greater rewards and moved further up the assignment list.

If Bjorn survives, he will take his revenge on the Iron Fists—resulting in a major gang war that will tear up the inner city. The station will expect the PCs' team to cover the events. If the PCs helped Bjorn in the battle, he will make them honorary gang members and will supply them with information (like plans for rumbles) as long as they don't give the information to the police. If they betray him, he will try to kill them.

NEW MEDIA EQUIPMENT

The following equipment may assist the PCs in their media adventures.

Helmet Camera

The helcam was originally developed for media personnel covering stories in combat zones (such as most modern American cities). It soon caught on as a camera for general use. The device consists of a form-fitted nylon helmet (SP=20) equipped with four receiving lenses and two microphones. The picture is shown, along with other data (lighting, noise level and so forth) in a heads up display on the surface of the helmet's faceplate. The camera and microphones are controlled by a keypad attached to the user's chest or wrist. The helmet can hold two microcassettes at a time, and each is good for an hour of sound and picture (color, of course).

Options available on the standard helcam are similar to options offered for cyberoptics and cyberaudio, except for the prices, the exact technology involved, and the fact that the helcam has no humanity cost. The options available and their prices are as follows: infrared ($100), micro/telescopics ($150), low-lite enhancement ($100), image enhancement ($150), thermograph sensor ($100), radio splice ($50), and phone link ($75). The helcam can also be "smartchipped" (requires that the user have interface plugs) so that the equipment is under direct and instant control. This adds $750 to the cost of the helcam, but yields a bonus of +2 to the character's Photography and Film skills.

Basic Helcam: $700.

Recording Cassettes: $5 each.

Head Camera

The hedcam is considerably rarer than the helcam, but is gaining popularity, especially among the younger camerajocks. The hedcam is basically an extensive cyberoptic/cyberaudio cybertech device. It replaces one eye and ear, as well as the skin on one side of the head (it is connected directly to the bone to hold it in place). A camera lens replaces the eye, with a smaller focusing lens under the main lens. The ear is replaced with a complex audio pickup system. Between the eye and the ear is a recording unit that holds one recording disk good for an hour of sound and picture. Control of the hedcam is linked directly into the character's nervous system, which gives him a +2 on his Photography and Film skills.

The hedcam can be equipped with normal cyberoptic cyberaudio options at normal costs



(both in dollars and humanity). For an additional $100, the hedcam can be equipped with a belt-carried recording unit that holds two recording cassettes, thus expanding memory to three hours without replacing cassettes.

The advantages of this unit are that the camerajock always has his camera ready, and this device shows the person's commitment to the media industry. It also looks "cool."

Basic Hedcam: $1600.

Cassettes: $5 each.

Humanity Cost: 3D6 (excludes options).

Recorder Pack

A character who has cyberoptics and cyberaudio (basically cameras and microphones) can have a repak installed. The optics/audio need not be modified, and only an additional link is made to them. The repak is placed in a convenient body cavity (it is only the size of a matchbox) and is controlled at will. It has the capacity to record up to an hour of sound, pictures or both. If the character has interface plugs, the repak can be wired to them so that the information can be transferred. The character can replay, erase and edit the contents of the repak at will (the images are replayed into the optics/audio), which makes the repak useful as a kind of extra memory. If a character lacks interface plugs, an information retrieval plug (which cannot be used for anything else) can be installed for $50 (HC=1D3).

The repak is popular for covert media operations, as well as industrial and military espionage and so forth. Of course, the more they are used, the more paranoid people will become.

Audio Only: $100. HC=1.

Video Only: $150. HC=1.

Combination: $225. HC=1. Ω

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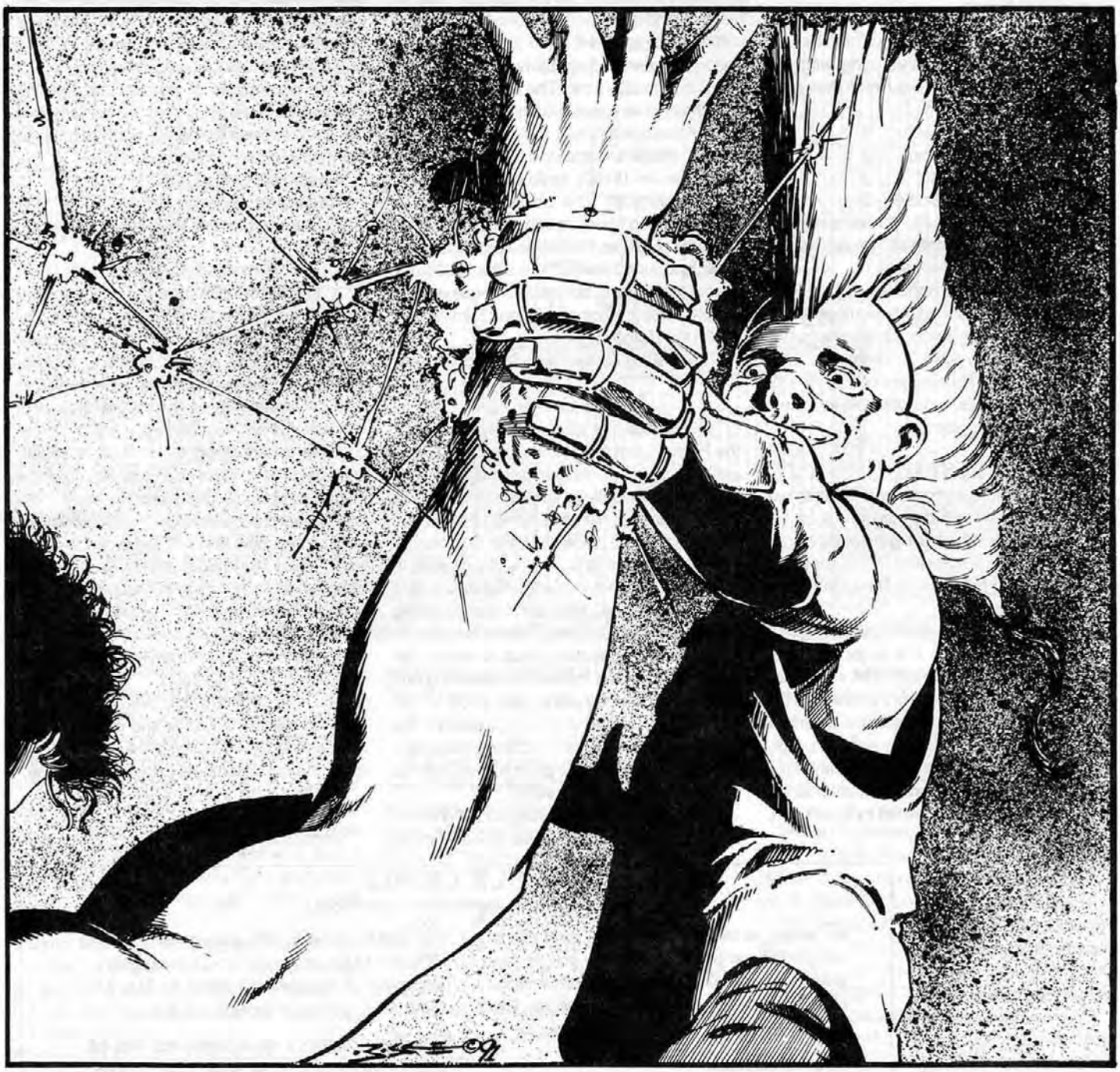
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An Arm and a Leg

Cyberlimb rules and options by Dan Snuffin



People aren't always what they seem in *Shadowrun*. Your adversary might look totally human, but when you get in close, he might possess superhuman abilities. Knowing what you're up against might give you just the edge you need. And knowing your options might tempt you to toward some "self improvements" of your own. Consider, then, these new rules and options for cyberlimbs.

CYBERLEGS

Cyberlegs increase running speed by a multiplier of 1.5. The user may also jump up to five meters without taking damage. A kick from a cyberleg is equal to the users Strength +1, but never exceeds the racial maximum without the purchase of increased Strength. Storage compartments can be built into the thigh and calf at no extra charge.

Foot Weapons: Cyberlegs can be equipped with foot

spurs and toe razors at no extra cost. Note that footwear may make full use of such weapons difficult. Nonretractable versions make footwear impossible.

Cyberholster: The hip compartment may be designed to conceal and holster a weapon (like in *Robocop*). As a general rule, weapons weighing 2.5 kg or less may be concealed in this manner. It takes two turns to draw such a weapon. This holster system costs 1050¥.

Built-In Medkit: Installed in the hip compartment, this option carries the same supplies as a normal medkit minus the doctor. You'll just have to rely on your own skills with this one. 180¥.

Concealed Knife: The knife (or throwing knife) is hidden behind a removable panel in the calf. 100¥.

CYBERARMS

While cyberarms do not allow the user exceptional lifting abilities, they can do exceptional crushing damage. Crushing damage to humans is (Str)M3 and may render a crushed limb useless. Cyberarm punches inflict (Str)M2 stun damage. The strength of a cyberarm is equal to the user's Strength +1, but never exceeds the racial maximum without the purchase of increased Strength.

Only one weapons system may be installed in a cyberarm, but any system can be combined with hand razors and spurs.

Burning Hands: Electric filaments in the user's fingers and palm superheat the outside metal, burning anything the user touches. Damage to anyone touched is 4M3. This device may also be used to set fire to some flammable materials (such as paper). Insulation and a cooling system prevent the heat from damaging the rest of the cyberarm. 9000¥.

Shocking Grasp: This cyberarm weapon operates as a built-in shock glove (*Street Samurai Catalog* page 11). However, punch damage is not reduced. The hand is insulated to prevent damage and electric shock to the rest of the limb. 3000¥.



Na-Palm: Imagine having a flamethrower right in the palm of your hand! This built-in device will shoot a stream of fiery chemicals from a port at the base of the palm up to three meters for one second. Na-Palm is fluid and sticks to anything, burning for 10D6 turns. The substance does 5M3 damage to human targets and will continue to do damage until extinguished. Anything less than heavy armor will only offer two successes against a Na-Palm attack. Na-Palm is fueled by a gas cannister stored in the cyberarm and conforms to the same basic design as the cybergun. An experimental version is also in the works that hooks up to a backpack storage system, allowing longer range and extended use. 10,000¥ for Na-Palm, 300¥ for extra cannisters.

Dart Thrower: A more subtle alternative to cyberguns, this system fires darts with precision and accuracy. Use the range for the hold-out pistol, with darts doing 5M2 damage. Darts may also be designed to inject your favorite toxin or drug. A cartridge carrying six darts is loaded into the arm. Cost: 600¥.

Injection Spur: A successful hit with this spur delivers a dose of drug. A reloadable cylinder in the arm holds 10 doses. Add 300¥ to the cost of the spur to get this poisonous option.

Time Display: Available at the touch of a button. 100¥. Ω

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Green Squad 3



By Stephen Marinaccio



Before I joined the Rebellion, I looked to the stars in hopes of one day roaming the galaxy. And now, after eight weeks of training with Green Squad, I'm almost ready to join the rest of the Alliance out there battling the Empire.

ATC-5/GS is not the most luxurious place I've ever been, but I think I've learned the meaning of teamwork and dedication.

The main level of the complex is old hat now—the medical ward, weapons locker, communications, barracks and kitchen, too. Every morning I hike, run and exercise outside in the jungles of Ksift. Every time I return to the complex, I see the second floor; a great dome coming to a full arc just under the tree line. The top is camouflaged, and the windows are tinted. I sure would like to know what's up there.

Alliance Training Center-5/Green Squad (ATC-5/GS) is a specialized training center for troops entering the Green Squad branch. Located on the planet of Ksift in the outer rim territories, it's an excellent place to train the newest Alliance troops. The closest city is Rakati, a 42-hour hike away. The residents of Rakati fear the Empire and don't like Rebels in their city. The only other Alliance post on Ksift is a security operation station, about a week's hike from the station.

The training center tutors 72 students at a time, divided into eight training squads. The squad the PCs are in includes one medic, one pilot and one designated leader. A droid (PC or NPC) and a force-using character are optional.

COMBAT TESTS

Following their morning course of exercises, the PCs return to the ATC-5/GS with a great sense of anticipation. This is the final day of their basic training, and at 9 a.m., they are scheduled to report to the mysterious second floor for a series of combat simulation tests.

When the appointed time arrives, the PCs are lead to the doors of the elevator to the second floor dome area. Instructor Bret Hanson hands each a comlink and a heavy blaster pistol, specially altered so as to fire only on stun. The targets in the tests are all computer-operated drones (see statistics below). When enough hits are scored to represent a kill, the computer will shut off each drone's weapons, which are also set on stun only.

The test will begin when a light at the top of the dome turns red. When the PCs accomplish the course objective, the light will turn green, and the PCs may advance to the rest area platform for three minutes before their next simulation begins.

Hanson motions the PCs into the elevator, wishes them good luck, then steps back as the doors woosh closed. The PCs wait tensely as the elevator begins to rise to the second floor.

Drones: *Dex:*3D+2 *Per:*3D *Str:*4D+1 *Move:* 2D+2.

Stun Blaster Damage: 4D. See Stun Damage on page 15 of the *Star Wars Rules Companion* for more information.

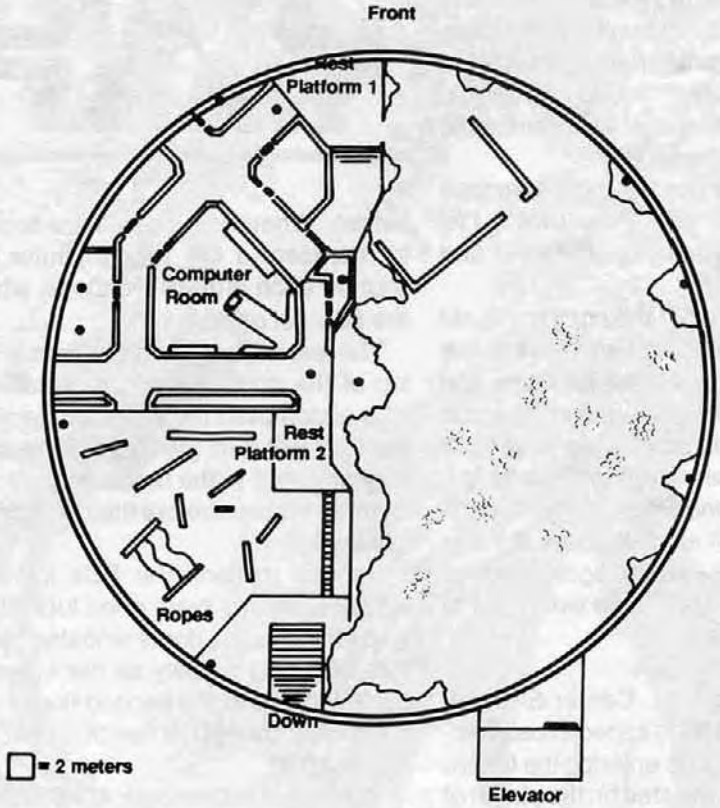
SIMULATION 1: FOREST

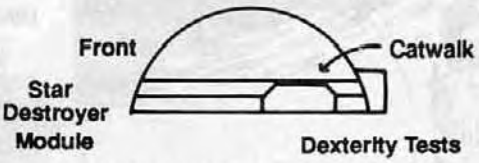
As the elevator doors slide open, the PCs look over their first battlefield. The landscape is amazingly realistic! The elevator opens at the edge of the cliff, five meters above a pond of unknown depth, measuring about seven meters out and about 10 meters wide. A forest begins at the edge of the pond, and beyond the trees is what looks to be a building in a small clearing. The comlink comes to life, and Hanson's voice comes through. "Get to the building," he says before the comlink goes dead. The light at the top of the dome blinks red.

The PCs must overcome several obstacles to reach the building. First is a wall, fabricated to be like a mountain cliff, with small outcroppings to grapple onto. An Easy Climbing roll will get the PCs down safely. If one of the PCs fails his roll, he falls into the water below. If a PC falls or jumps into the water, he suffers 2D of damage.

The water is only about a meter deep, so the PCs can cross the water with no problem once they reach it. As they start into the forest, a stun beam barely misses one of the PCs. The first drone

ATC-5/GS Upper Level

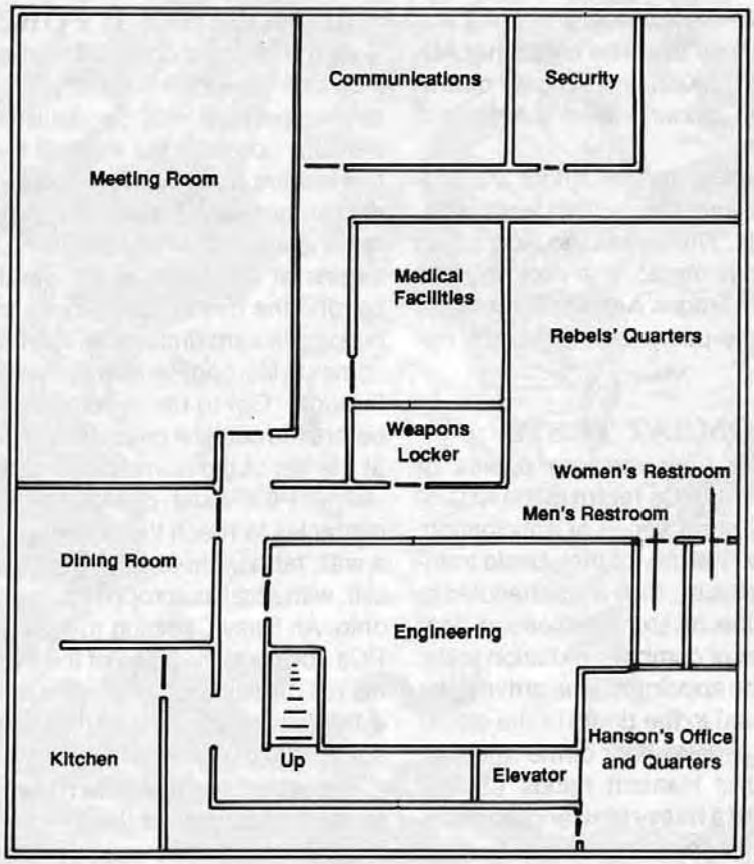




Other side houses the wilderness test.



ATC-5/GS Lower Level



Key

Tree

Door

Catwalk

Stairs

has appeared. The PCs will want to take cover, dodging fire and shooting at the drones as they make their way toward their destination. They will encounter two drones in the forest and three more in the clearing. As they reach their destination, the drones turn off, and the light at the top of the dome turns green. Hanson informs the PCs that they can advance to the resting platform. After three minutes, the light turns red again.

SIMULATION 2: STAR DESTROYER

The PCs must now retrieve a computer file from within an Imperial computer Unfortunately, the computer is on-board a simulated star destroyer.

A ramp leads down from the resting platform to a blast door. The comlinks crackle to life, and Hanson says the next objective is to retrieve data file Green3 from the computer. The comlink goes dead. The door does *not* slide open when the PCs stand in front of it.

To gain access to the ship, the PCs must open the door using an Easy Security skill roll. Once inside, the PCs travel down passageways and check the doors while trying to defend against drones. The drones here are more numerous than in the first simulation, and they will pursue the PCs relentlessly.

The computer room is decked from ceiling to floor in computer hardware. In the center, on a desk, is a keyboard. A Moderate Computer skill roll is needed to access the correct information.

As the PCs complete the retrieval of the file Green3, the dome light does not turn green as expected, and Hanson does not contact the PCs. Instead, an alarm sounds, and the room suddenly turns red as emergency lights flash. The drones, however, are now inactive.

This is not part of the simulation. An Imperial strike force has invaded the complex, and the PCs are in for some real combat.

SIMULATION 3: DEXTERITY

If the PCs advance to the resting platform for three minutes, then proceed to the third simulation, they will face a test of their dexterity. The test includes a series of balance beams and ropes. They can complete this test with no difficulty and with no firing from the drones. At the end of the test is a door leading to the first floor via a staircase.

If the PCs wish to investigate the strange happenings without taking the third test, they can bypass the simulation by using the catwalk and heading to the door, which leads to the first floor via a staircase. If they return back through the first two simulation areas, they will find the elevator inoperable.

COMBAT

After exiting the stairwell, the PCs find themselves in a deserted hallway. Only a red light flashes up and down the hall. Blaster fire comes from the front of the building.

The PCs' weapons are still set for stun, and stun only. They can make their way to the weapons locker on the first floor to arm themselves. A Moderate roll will open the lock on the weapons locker. Inside the locker are 15 more blasters specially set on stun, two normal blaster rifles, three heavy blasters, a thermal detonator, three grenades and a portable ion cannon.

As the PCs arm themselves (or if they forget about the weapons locker), their comlink crackles to life. They can barely make out Hansen's voice. His words fade in and out between the static, but the PCs are able to make out a few phrases. "Empire...weapons locker...in front of the building...have to fight" The rest is a mumbled snarl of static and background blaster fire sounds.

If the PCs head in any direction other than toward the front of the building, they will encounter four or five stormtroopers in the halls. After that, then will encounter an initiate of Green Squad 7, who tells the PCs that their help is needed out front.

In front of the building, 15 stormtroopers are engaging Green Squad initiates, and eight stormtroopers are heading straight for the PCs! Three vehicles are parked in front of the building: a mobile command base and two compact assault vehicles (see pages 70-71 of the *Imperial Sourcebook* for vehicle statistics). On an Easy Perception roll, a PC not actively engaged in combat will notice that the laser cannon on the mobile command base is pointed at the receiving dish of ATC-5/GS!

Entering the mobile command base is not easy. A Difficult Security roll will let the PCs gain access. If the PCs are



unable to gain access, they can always climb the sides to reach the cannon and disable it, wait for troopers to ambush them, or even try to take over a compact assault vehicle and turn its weapons on the mobile command base. Climbing the sides requires an Easy Climbing skill roll.

If the PCs gain access to the mobile command base, they will have to battle five stormtroopers and three crewmembers. If they overcome their foes, a Moderate Security roll will get them into the top hatch.

Once the PCs take the mobile command base out of commission, the rest of the stormtroopers surrender.

DEBRIEFING

Later that night, Hanson congratulates each of the Green Squad initiates on their performance. The PCs have passed their tests and will now be known as Green Squad 3. Ω

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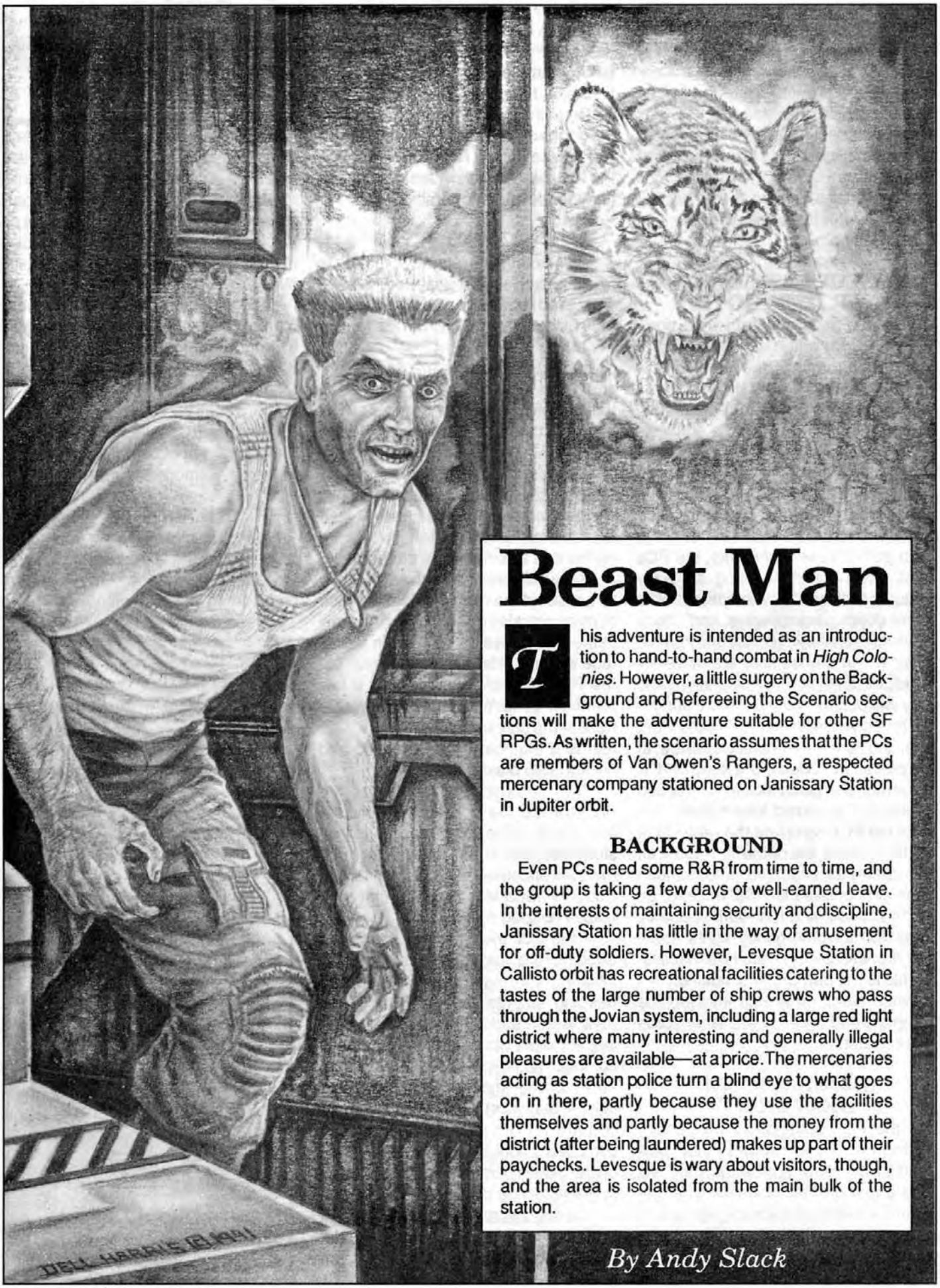


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Beast Man

This adventure is intended as an introduction to hand-to-hand combat in *High Colonies*. However, a little surgery on the Background and Refereeing the Scenario sections will make the adventure suitable for other SF RPGs. As written, the scenario assumes that the PCs are members of Van Owen's Rangers, a respected mercenary company stationed on Janissary Station in Jupiter orbit.

BACKGROUND

Even PCs need some R&R from time to time, and the group is taking a few days of well-earned leave. In the interests of maintaining security and discipline, Janissary Station has little in the way of amusement for off-duty soldiers. However, Levesque Station in Callisto orbit has recreational facilities catering to the tastes of the large number of ship crews who pass through the Jovian system, including a large red light district where many interesting and generally illegal pleasures are available—at a price. The mercenaries acting as station police turn a blind eye to what goes on in there, partly because they use the facilities themselves and partly because the money from the district (after being laundered) makes up part of their paychecks. Levesque is wary about visitors, though, and the area is isolated from the main bulk of the station.

By Andy Slack

APPROACH

The PCs are fresh off the shuttle from Janissary Station, wandering through Levesque's red light district and wondering where to spend their money. They are unarmed and wearing only light cloth fatigues.

Suddenly, a grim figure leaps out from a nearby alley, pounces on a passerby, and begins to savage that innocent with fingers and teeth.

MAP DESCRIPTION

The map details the vicinity of the attack.

Alleyway: This is where the maniac springs from, only a few meters from the PCs.

Cafe: This is a French-style pavement cafe, with a bar inside and chairs and tables outside. PCs searching for impromptu weapons may stroll across to the cafe and acquire chairs or bottles from its outdoor facilities.

Sleazy Hotel: This is where the maniac was staying before the attack. There are balconies and fire escapes to swing from if your PCs are feeling exuberant during any fight which ensues.

Bar: Additional brawlers enter the fight from here. The bar has a bouncer (see Refereeing the Scenario).

House of Ill Repute: Here, mercenaries and ship crews can indulge themselves in tea, crumpets and polite conversation with skilled professional companions (probably biogens in a district this cheap). The house has a bouncer (see Refereeing the Scenario) and is another source of extra combatants.

Isolation Doors: Like most stations, Levesque is segmented to minimize casualties and damage if its hull is breached. The isolation doors will automatically seal off the area if a sudden pressure drop is detected on either side. They can also be triggered manually by the station's security forces in the event of a riot to limit damage and injury to the red-light district. Once they are triggered in such a case, the traditional next step is to introduce tranquilizer gas into the air supply to calm things down.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

Most groups of PCs can be counted on to intervene, especially if the innocent victim is young, good-looking, and of the opposite gender. If not, the maniac will assault the PCs a few combat rounds after polishing off the passerby.

The maniac is a crewman from a visiting freighter who has sampled one of the district's more illegal pleasures—a drug and hypnosis combination which allows him to partake vicariously of the life and feelings of a large, ferocious animal. In effect, until the drugs wear off, he is that animal—in this case, a tiger. Afterward, he will remember the experience—a great contrast with his mundane and frustrating daily life. Normally, those indulging in this addiction are securely locked away until the drugs wear off, but this addict managed to escape when a maintenance robot attending to a faulty circuit accidentally opened the door to his room.

The maniac believes the passerby he has just savaged is a deer he has been stalking, and that the PCs are scavengers come to steal his kill.

Opposing Forces: The beast man will attack the PCs (if they don't attack first) as if he were a tiger—biting, clawing and roaring.

One unarmed maniac, however desperate, is no match against a group of PCs. But just as the PCs start to get the upper hand, a group of the maniac's fellow crewmen pass by and intervene to help him out. Adjust numbers so that each PC has a single opponent, and match the PC with the best unarmed combat skills against the maniac.

Additional brawlers can enter the scene from the bar or house of ill repute. Also, as the situation escalates, fellow mercs may decide to join the fight on behalf of the PCs. Balance out any friendly newcomers by more ship crewmen or members of a rival mercenary company.

Enter the Authorities: Several establishments in the vicinity have bouncers. They will not voluntarily enter the fight. However, they will keep a close eye on the activity. If their buildings or customers are threatened, they will try to stop the brawl or divert it elsewhere while someone inside calls the police.

A clear victor may eventually emerge from the brawl. Otherwise, a squad of mercenary police armed with clubs and riot gear will arrive on the scene, summoned by locals to break up the fight before too much property damage occurs.

Morning After: How the PCs come out of this situation depends very much on what happens during the fight and how it breaks up. Also, the PCs' fate may be affected by whether the PCs or authorities trace the madman's trail back to his hotel room and discover his addiction. Below are several alternative outcomes.

- The police who break up the fight can be members of a rival mercenary company, who frame the PCs for causing the riot. This will get the PCs in trouble with the local cops and their unit commander. Traditionally, they can only redeem themselves by undertaking a highly dangerous mission.
- The PCs may lose the fight. This earns them numerous cuts and bruises, plus a chewing out from their commander for damaging the unit's prestige.
- The PCs may subdue the madman during the rumble and thus save other passersby from harm. They will get a pat on the back.
- If the PCs killed the madman in the process of subduing him, they may well be arrested and charged with manslaughter. After all, he had no murderous intent. They will probably be released after an investigation reveals the circumstances, but will acquire several enemies among the ship crew fraternity—the dead man's friends.

NPCS

To speed up play, assume that NPCs are all one of the generic character types from page 58 of *High Colonies*, with a score of 13 in all characteristics.

Maniac: A generic miner. The maniac will attack with bare hands and teeth, and will not seek to use weapons or armor.

Crewmen: Generic miners or pilots. These will be initially unarmed and unarmored, but will try to grab clubs or other improvised weapons before entering the fray. If you're feeling nasty, some of them could have knives.

Fellow Mercs: Generic soldiers, also initially unarmed. These, too, will remedy that oversight before joining the fun.

Bouncers: Generic soldiers, unarmored, armed with clubs and possibly knives.

Mercenary Police: Generic soldiers, equipped with riot helmets and shields, truncheons (treat as clubs), gas grenades and gas masks. To them, this is just an everyday brawl and doesn't justify the use of firearms. Ω

High Colonies *is a science-fiction RPG of the year 2188. For more information, contact Waterford Publishing House Ltd., Box 3742, Main Post Office, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6B 3Z1.*

Come Join the Party



Adding New Players to an Established Campaign

By James L. Cambias

Want to bore and confuse your friends? Invite several new people to a regular gaming session, then rush them through the character-creation process while simultaneously outlining the campaign background. Your experienced players can entertain themselves by consuming all the drinks and chips. Dump the newly created characters into an existing party of experienced PCs, then get on with whatever adventure the group was involved in.

This process will ensure that new players will have no idea what is going on and will remain in the background while the older players dominate the scene. You'll be lucky if the new players come back for a second session; they may even give up the idea of roleplaying altogether.

Something like that has probably happened at least once to everyone who plays roleplaying games. A long-running campaign can be richly rewarding to referee and great fun for the players. But for a new player joining an established group, it's like learning to drive by entering the Indy 500. A little preparation may be in order.

BRIEFING SESSION

Perhaps the single most important part of introducing new players to an existing campaign is to hold a briefing. Rather than trying to squeeze everything into the regular gaming session, meet with the new players at a different time. This way they can create characters without being rushed, and you can give them a more complete explanation of the campaign background and game system. There will be time to answer questions and give advice.

Getting Their Feet Wet: Another helpful technique is to have a small scenario ready for the new players to play through before they join the main campaign. This lets the players familiarize themselves with the game, your refereeing style and their characters. An introductory adventure should practically be mandatory for players unfamiliar with the game mechanics. The referee can use this scenario to give the new PCs a reason to join the established group of campaigners.

CREATING APPROPRIATE CHARACTERS

New characters joining a group of experienced adventurers must be appropriate to the team. This is not to say that a new player should just mindlessly copy everyone else—unusual new characters can supply much-needed variety.

But the new PCs have to be able to survive in the campaign and ought to have approximately the same goals as the rest of the party.

Character Type: Characters should have skills and abilities which will be useful in the campaign. This does *not* mean that all characters must be exactly alike. A scientist with many technical skills could be a valuable addition to a group of tough mercenaries, and a group of wizards might desperately need the services of a warrior. But a ranger skilled in outdoor survival would not fit well with a gang of urban thieves. (Of course, the referee has control of the campaign; if he wants to start doing wilderness adventures, then the ranger might be vital to the group's survival.)

The point is that the referee should not let players create characters who will have nothing to do, which would only lead to boredom and frustration for everyone involved.

Goals: If the established PC group has a definite objective (overthrowing the Empire, defeating the evil Dr. Dread, etc.), make sure the new player's goals are complementary. If the existing PCs are peaceful merchants trying to get rich and retire, a vengeance-obsessed rebel will have difficulty fitting in. This also means that characters generally should not have directly opposing religions or alignments. While such characters might cooperate in order to survive, they would ultimately come into conflict. Anything else would be bad roleplaying.

Power Level: One problem with creating new characters for an established campaign is that new PCs are weaker and less experienced than older ones. So not only are the players at a disadvantage, being unfamiliar with the world, but their characters are the weaklings of the group. The simplest solution is to give newly created characters some bonus experience points before they start to play. A less obvious and possibly more rewarding tactic is to put the party in some situations where the group will depend on the new players, which will give them plenty of opportunities to gain experience.

JOINING THE GROUP

New PCs often just magically appear in the middle of a campaign with no good reason for being there. Without a second thought, they obediently tag along, cheerfully getting into situations of hair-raising danger. The "beaming down" method is quick and easy, and causes no interruption of the ongoing story.

Which is exactly what is wrong with it! A roleplaying campaign is a story, and major characters in stories don't just appear. They have a reason for being there, with motivations to explain their actions.

Exactly why are the new characters joining the established group? In campaigns where the PCs are members of an organization, this part is simple—Star Fleet Command or whoever has assigned new personnel to the group. If a group of mercenaries is hired for a special mission, the new guy can simply be worked in as a fellow hireling that the existing PCs have to work with.

But if the PCs are simply a group of adventurers out seeking their fortunes, there are problems. The time-honored method of encountering new PCs in the tavern or starport saloon just doesn't ring true. Would you get involved in life-threatening situations where you would have to rely on somebody you met in a bar? There are several more plausible and interesting ways to introduce your characters to one another.

Relatives: One simple way to bring in new PCs is to make their characters relatives of existing PCs. This can be the old "long-lost brother," but can also be cousins, nephews and nieces, husbands and wives, or even children ("You're my *what*?!").

This rationale can be expanded to include old college pals, childhood friends, war buddies, ex-spouses or perhaps even members of the characters' gaming group.

The referee should be aware of a disadvantage to using blood kin: Relatives tend to leave things to each other when they die, which means that magic items, large sums of money and other valuables simply get passed from character to character. Stiff inheritance taxes may become necessary.

NPCs: An extremely simple way to introduce a new player is to let him play an existing nonplayer character. Such NPCs have a reason to hang around with the other characters; they often have skills and abilities useful to the group; and they save the new player the effort of creating a character. This can be quite useful for players unfamiliar with the game system, who otherwise might not know what qualities would be useful in generating a character. A disadvantage is that the player may have difficulty identifying with a character he did not create.

Patrons: A little-used method is to let a new player play the characters' patron. The patron has a clear motive for hanging around with the PCs—he has hired them. Since he is paying them, his goals become their goals. The referee must brief the new player on the goal his character wishes to accomplish and the resources he has available. Sometimes the new PC patron can really be a "subcontractor" working for the real patron—this way the referee can still use the big boss as a mouthpiece.

In the Same Boat: The referee can also use the introductory scenario to set up a situation which will throw all the player characters together. Battles, disasters and other unpleasant occurrences are useful. If the new PCs are being attacked by overwhelming odds or starving in the desert, the main party can come along and save their lives. Such a debt must be repaid.

Or else the referee can arrange for everyone to be prisoners together. It's kind of hard not to get to know the guy you're chained to. The PCs will have to work together to escape.

Competition: In the introductory scenario, the new characters can be sent on the same mission as the other players, but by a different patron. Their paths will cross, and the characters may agree to work together to accomplish their goal. But conflicts may arise.

These suggestions should help you incorporate new players into your campaign. A small amount of planning and creativity can ensure that everyone has fun and enjoys the experience. Isn't that why people play? Ω

Aliens Adventure Game

Leading Edge Games.
$21.95.
Design: Barry Nakazono and David McKenzie.
Editing: Irene Kinzek.
208-page science-fiction RPG.

Leading Edge Games took a great universe with cool hardware and messily glued it all to the *Phoenix Command* rules set. The tech-candy movie we all drooled over through 15 viewings got a roleplaying butcher job.

A quick first glance leaves you with a good first impression: lots of evocative movie stills and quotes from the script, plus an eight-page color signature. At this point you're saying, "Time to rock 'n' roll—let's play!"

CHARACTER GENERATION

So we start in with character generation—rolling up a Colonial Marine's Strength, Will, Intelligence, Health, Agility, etc. Hold it! I have to be a Colonial Marine? What if I want to be a colonist or a freighter pilot or a member of a salvage crew or a corporate sleazeball. Oh well, I guess most people would want to play marines.

Your character's initial skills are determined through learning rolls. Your learning roll target number is derived from the sum of your Intelligence and Motivation stats minus 10. Roll less than this result on percentiles and you increase a learning rank. There are seven such ranks, starting with Unskilled (which carries a –8 skill rating modifier), running up through Grand Master (a +10 skill modifier). All skill rolls are made on 3D6 where you're trying to roll less than the task's modified base odds number to succeed (although they aren't really "odds" per se). Using a standard roleplaying mechanic, the *Aliens* referee sets the task's difficulty level, which can range from Very Easy (base odds to succeed of 16) to Extremely Difficult (base odds to succeed of 4).

THE PROBLEMS START

Now this is where I start to take exception to the *Phoenix Command* system with respect to roleplaying situations. To determine the success roll for an unchallenged task, you add your character's skill rating modifier to the difficulty level's base odds. Well, that's okay on paper, but let's translate it into a game situation:

Review by Kevin Barrett

You're a referee with five players who all want to do the same thing at the same time: Let's say they all need to jump a chasm in a low tunnel while they're being pursued by 100 Alien warriors. The easiest way to handle this during the heat of a game session is to say, "You've all got to jump the chasm, or you're dead meat. The task is Average difficulty. Everyone needs to roll a modified 10 or less. Who makes it?" Unfortunately, with this system as written, the referee has to assign modified success roll numbers to each character individually, based upon the appropriate skill rating: "Jump the chasm, or you're facehugger bait. The difficulty is Average, so that's a base 10. Hudson, you're skill rating at Balance is Novice, so with –4 you need a 6. Drake, you're a Balance Professional, so with +4 you need a 14...." At which point one of your players says, "I guess the Aliens have eaten us by now, huh?" A small problem easily fixed? Perhaps. But it's indicative of what's to follow.

Let's take interactive tasks, where your skill is matched against another's. Here, your success roll starts with the difficulty level's base odds, to which are added your skill rating modifier minus your opponent's skill rating modifier. Sounds easy—but these modifiers can be either positive or negative. We can all do this math, but I'm not sure I want to be adding and subtracting negative numbers four hours into a heated RPG. It's a klunky game mechanic that shows that the *Aliens* system is about to bury us.

Speaking of klunky, the base odds/success roll task resolution system allows characters to *always* succeed at some tasks under certain conditions and/or *always* fail at others. There's no built-in fumble rule or critical success possibility. That sort of determinism was generally cast out of all new roleplaying games some years ago.

Let's take a look at another rule—crew injury when a vehicle careens off a road embankment. Here the book tells a referee to determine the level of risk faced by the crewmember during the accident. This can range from Minimal Risk to Extremely Dangerous. The risk level sets a base physical damage rating inflicted on the crewmember. This number is multiplied by the amount that the offending driving success roll was missed by, then multiplied by 1D6. The result is the amount of physical damage the guy takes, and if you've done your math right, you can then go to the combat results rules to find out how long he has until he bleeds to death.

See what I'm getting at? This game system is a *dinosaur*. Several fine roleplaying systems have been published in our industry since *Phoenix Command*. They're fast, exciting and fun, and produce movie-like results. *Phoenix Command* and, therefore, *Aliens*, buries itself in minutiae.

IT'S TIME TO DIE

Just to annoy ourselves some more, let's move on to the combat system. I guess we should have expected by now that we'd roll to hit the target, then roll for hit location, then check the glancing shot roll, then, if necessary, find the incapacitation chance, roll it and, finally, make the regaining consciousness roll. Of course, all this would be bad enough were it not for the fact that the combat phases are only two seconds long. Combat's going to take forever. Though "realistic," the *Phoenix Command* combat system does not capture one important aspect of the *Aliens* movie: Combat flew by in a dazzling flash. Sure, you'll get these results with the *Aliens* system as its written, but in the process you'll get lost in the endless haze of repetitive dice rolling. Where's the fun and excitement in that?

Here's another thing that gets me about the *Aliens* combat game. Despite its complexity and detail, character incapacitation is delt with only as it relates to direct combat effectiveness. That means, if you're incapacitated by a hit, all you know is that you can't attack anything. What if your character is incapacitated, but conscious and coherent, and can still move away from the battle? Maybe he can relay messages on his comm link radio. Maybe characters need to have their sergeant alert and thinking, even though he's down. All the rules say is that it's up to the referee to decide the state of incapacitated characters. A game that gives me six pages of detailed combat charts telling me how a character or Alien is killed, but can't tell me if my incapacitated character can say, "Blow the demo charge," just doesn't cut it.

As another hold-over from *Phoenix Command*, the *Aliens* combat system also tends to be very "bullet oriented." Most combat effects are framed in terms of how they relate to the use of slug throwers. For instance, though a shotgun and a flamer are speced out in the weapons section, their use is treated in an ad hoc fashion. Shotguns fire like rifles but with short range. But they penetrate like pistols. Finally, another special rule governs the damage effects of certain glancing rolls. Just give me a shotgun table if you must—what's the problem?

I was also under the impression that the harnessed smartguns used by Vasquez and

Drake were actually energy weapons, not the bullet-oriented machineguns they're made out to be in this game. Didn't the two of them hand over power cartridges to Apone when they were told to clear magazines? Oh well, that's just a personal observation.

My final problem with the combat system is that vehicle-to-vehicle combat is run on a different time scale than man-to-man combat. That's fine until you run into man-to-vehicle situations. Sure, there are conversion notes, but why couldn't a unified scale have been developed? The words *"Phoenix Command"* come to mind.

LOOKS LIKE TRAVELLER, SMELLS LIKE TRAVELLER

I see a definite **Traveller** influence in the design of some of this game's subsystems. The first is in character generation. Year-by-year characteristic development, delt with by branch of service entered, is a system both games use, and *Traveller's* brownie points sound an awful lot like *Aliens'* merit points.

Next, in **Traveller** it is very difficult to gain a new skill or improve an old one. So too with *Aliens*. In fact, unless you defeat 10 equally matched opponents, you can only attempt to raise your gun combat skill (or any other training-based skill for that matter) once per game year. Once you've rolled up your character, I hope you like him the way he is.

Finally, we're left with the spacecraft FTL drive system—called jump drive and rated from jump 1 to jump 5. There are jump routes between systems and even a thinly veiled variation of **Traveller**'s week-to-jump rule. This is so much like the **Traveller** system that I suspect the designers just ran out of steam at this point.

Now, I'm not against ripping off other game systems. If it works, use it, right? But with these *Aliens* systems, I get an uncomfortable feeling. I'm nagged by one question (particularly on the space drive): Why couldn't the designer come up with something closer to the movies? Given the rules, star map and jump routes presented, Hicks and company would have been waiting somewhat longer than the "17 days" stated in the movie before they would be relieved on LV-426—particularly since a spacecraft cannot move at all for six days after completing a single jump. The advancement or differentiation in space drive technology from the first movie to the second is also not accounted for in the rules. Remember Lambert in the first movie saying that the *Nostromo* was 16 (or was it 12?) months' flight time out from earth once *Mother* stopped at LV-426? It sure didn't take the *Suloco* that long to get from earth back to LV-426 a half-century later. Also, what sort of drive system was Ripley's shuttle using? None of those described in the rules fit.

SOURCE MATERIAL

If there are good things in this game, they're in the source material. Even though no timeline of events is given, there is an interesting history for earth and space exploration. The primary antagonists in the *Aliens* universe are the Nations (of earth), the Corporations and the Interstellar Commerce Commission, which balances the other two. This is a great dynamic, and when far-flung, independence-minded colonies are tossed in, there's potential for plenty of conflict.

The worlds described for the star map are diverse, believable and interesting. Some new alien races are described, too. I particularly like the Harvester race of Tartarus, though it's a shame no drawings are provided. On that point, buyers should be forewarned that there are no drawings or schematics in the rules. This is a real drawback. I would have liked to have seen the interior layout of the *Suloco*, Hadley Station, the Aliens' lair, or even Ripley's earth-bound apartment block. No such luck. The adventures are devoid of layouts, too.

Of course, the Aliens from the movie are well described in one chapter, and there is some very interesting information here.

IN CLOSING

The *Aliens Adventure Game* focuses heavily on the Colonial Marines. Too much so. The rules give you the impression that they are the preeminent fighting force in the universe, rather than being one branch of an integrated military structure. I find this a little restrictive, particularly when coupled with the game's assumption that the *Suloco*-style frigate forms the basis of nearly *all* spacegoing military vessels. Even the personal equipment selection in the rules doesn't go far beyond the hardware presented in the movie. That's a shame, since this game universe has so much potential for expandability.

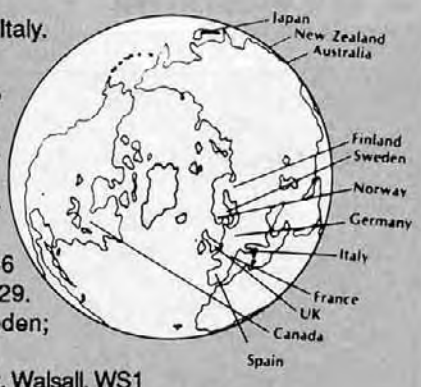
On the bright side, this book is very well written. The prose is impeccable, while the spelling and grammar have been thoroughly edited. During my brief scan of the rules, I only found one incorrect chart reference, which is pretty good. Ah, if only they had used a different game system!

Oh well, enough griping. Despite all I've said, I still like this product—mostly because I liked the movie. If nothing else, the source material is a good read and should give you plenty of ideas for military missions, whether you're running *Aliens*, **MegaTraveller, Twilight: 2000** or *Mechwarrior*. Ω

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Your Own Worst Enemy (Dark Conspiracy)	3.8
Master Race (2300 AD)	3.3
City of Death (Space: 1889)	4.1
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Deep Trouble (Call of Cthulhu)	3.7
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